

The High Calling-Meditations on St Paul's Letter to the Philippians-J H Jowett

The High Calling - Meditations on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians
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PREFACE

The purpose of this little book can be very simply stated. It makes no pretence whatever to be a learned exposition of this gracious epistle to the Philippians, although I trust that in no single instance does it pass beyond what is permitted by sound and accurate scholarship. I have taken the epistle, and have sought to lift it out of all remote and fleeting significance, by laying it side by side with the human interests, and the spiritual life and needs of our own day. The letter is alive, and in constant touch with the abiding concerns of the human heart; and I have tried, by divesting it of its ancient phraseology, and giving it modern expression, to bring its comfort and inspiration to some who are walking the pilgrim way in our own time. It is therefore intended for the oratory rather than the study. It seeks not to excite controversy, but to inspire devotion, to deepen the joy of consecration, and to clothe the soul in the radiant garment of praise.

J. H. Jowett.
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"To all ages of the Church— to our own especially — this epistle reads a great lesson. While we are expending our strength on theological definitions or ecclesiastical rules, it recalls us from these distractions to the very heart and centre of the Gospel — the life of Christ and the life in Christ. Here is the meeting-point of all our differences, the healing of all our feuds, the true life alike of individuals and sects and churches: here doctrine and practice are wedded together; for here is the ' Creed of Creeds involved in and arising out of the 'Work of Works/'"

THE COURTESY BORN OF JESUS

"Paul and Timothy" (Philippians 1:1,2)

How beautiful is the conjunction of the aged Apostle and the young disciple in sacred league and covenant! I wonder how much each owed to the other in the ministry of the Spirit? How far was it Timothy's ministry to keep the old man young, and to warm his soul continually with the kindling influence of youthful enthusiasm? It is a gracious remembrance, that, in these latter days of limitation and suspicion, Paul could drink at the fountain of a young man's love. He had the inexpressible privilege of scenting the perfumes of love's springtime, and feasting upon the first sweet fruits in the garden of a young and grace-filled soul. Beautiful must have been their companionship — youth revering age, and age having no contempt or suspicion of youth, but each ministering to the other of the flowers and fruits of his own season. "Paul and Timothy." It is the union of springtime and autumn; of enthusiasm and experience; of impulse and wisdom; of tender hope and quiet and rich assurance.

"Servants of Jesus Christ." The early Apostles gloried in exhibiting the landmarks of their Lord. Here, in this letter, the first thing the Apostle shows us is the mark of the branding. A little while ago I was present at a sheep-shearing in the very heart of the Highlands, and I noticed that when the heavy, burdensome fleece had been shorn from the affrighted sheep, the liberated beast was branded with the owner's initials and went bounding away, prominently exhibiting these signs of its owner's name. And Paul and Timothy had been delivered from a heavy burden: the vesture of oppressive habits had been removed by the power of a crucified Lord, and on their emancipated lives they bore the marks of their owner — the "brands" of the Lord Jesus. Whose I am. They belonged to Him who had redeemed them with a heavy price, and they counted it to be their glory, and their crown of rejoicing, that they were not their own, but the branded "bondservants" of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." The saints are reared in unlikely neighbourhoods. It was at Philippi that the multitude was so hostile and violent. It was at Philippi that Paul had "many stripes" laid upon him, and that he was "thrust into prison," and his feet "made fast in the stocks." One would have thought that in this fierce persecution the little Church would have been destroyed, and that in these scorching antagonisms the early, tender leaves of Christian faith and hope would have withered away. But "He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains" — even in those unlikely places — and He reared His saints amid the threatening decimations of Philippi. For let it be remembered that, though Philippi was the sphere of their living, it did not provide the rootage of their life. The saints were "at Philippi," but they were "in Christ Jesus," and that is the secret of their endurance "when the sun was up" and the hot beams of hostility blazed upon their unoffending heads. "Rooted ... in Christ Jesus," and flourishing anywhere! Lydia would be among "the saints at Philippi." Lydia would be among them, and those few women who met by the riverside to pray. And the jailer would be of the number, and his household, and many others who had been won by the constancy of a few, and "whose names are written in the book of life." There they were, a mere handful helping to sweeten the busy city as surely as one sprig of mignonette can spread its fragrance to the limits of a wide room.

"With the bishops and deacons." "Honour to whom honour is due." These men had done the work of collecting the help which had been sent to the needy Apostle, and they must receive special and generous recognition. St. Paul was a prince of courtesy. Courtesy is not the creation of effort, it is the product of grace : it is born, not made. Paul was born of grace, and therefore he was

gracious, and instinctively his courtesy fitted itself to all the changing requirements of the day. Mechanical courtesy is very unwelcome: it more frequently irritates than conciliates those to whom it is addressed. A little while ago I saw a table fountain sending up its frail and delicate sprays, but I could hear the click, click of the machinery by which it was propelled. How different from the natural spring, leaping with bright and noiseless spontaneity from unseen depths! True courtesy is the issue of natural springs, and its propulsion is in the Infinite. The courtesy of the Apostle Paul was "a river of water of life" that flowed "from the throne of God and of the Lamb."

"Grace to you." Behind graciousness was grace, and the courtesy broadened into a prayer for the supreme gift. Get grace, and all gifts are gained. Grace is the bountiful mother of all the graces. But who can define it? It is love; but it is more than love. It is love with a mysterious plus; it is love that never grows weary, that goes on expending with no faintest sign of possible exhaustion. It finds some analogy in radium, that marvellous element which is ceaselessly emitting its fervent rays, but with no sign of any diminution of its primary force. Human love can tire, its rays may grow cool or become intermittent; grace loves on, and on, and on, and in its shining presence it is always noon. Grace is the energy of the Divine affection, ministering to the unlovely, and endowing the unlovely with its own loveliness. "Grace to you."

"And peace." Where grace abides peace will dwell. They are inseparable companions. Grace is the native element in which all our powers awake and work in happy service. Now peace is not the absence of movement: it is the absence of friction. The real symbol of peace is not to be found in some secluded motionless mountain tarn, but in the majestic progress of some quiet, brimming river. Peace is not symbolised in the death chamber, but in the rhythmic, smooth movements of the enginehouse. When grace reigns, man moves in God in perfect unison, man co-operates with man in fellowship without strain, and "all that is within us praise and bless" God's "holy name." When grace reigns, life loses all its "strain and stress," and, in the absence of friction, "all things work together for good."

"From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And so this bright, energising river of "grace and peace" has its rise in the vast, two-sphered, and yet indivisible lake of "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Apostle traces all supreme gifts to their primary home. He does not pause at intermediate presences, nor does he offer his sacrifices at any secondary and inferior altar; he passes beyond all subordinate ministers and priesthoods, and presses forward to the august and lonely heights of sovereign holiness and love, and there he prostrates himself in humble adoration and praise. He distinguishes between channels and springs, between instruments and causes, and he reserves his doxologies for the Fountain. "Every good and every perfect gift is from above"; and away to these lofty springs the Apostle traces the river of "grace and peace." And let us carefully heed how firmly and naturally the Apostle exalts the Lord Jesus to the supreme rank of Divine Sovereignty. The Lord Jesus is one with the Father in the holy initiative of redeeming grace. He shares with the Father the glory of all redeeming ministries, and is one with Him in the origin and sustenance of our salvation. "From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

THE GRACE OF THANKSGIVING

"I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you"(Philippians 1:3-8)

How natural it is for the Apostle to begin his letters in thanksgiving! He is far more sensitive to the mercies of God than to the antagonisms of men. Grace always "far more abounded" than anything else. And thus it was, because mercy was so manifest, praise was ever ready. The song was ever the fleeter of foot and arrived before complaint was awake. The man who is eager in praise to God is not swift in the censure of men. Paul was always great in eulogy, and this, I think, because he was so ready in the praise of God. He had a fine eye for the lineaments of grace, and he could discern the sproutings of holy desire, even when they were buried beneath the refuse of sin and long-continued negligence. But the graces of the Philippians were not hidden. Their kinship with the Lord was most manifest. The Apostle's remembrance of them stretched across his recent troubled and laborious years like a line of golden light. The line was not broken by faithless intermissions. His remembrance of them was always bright, so that whenever he gazed upon the radiant track his soul was filled with praise.

"Always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy." Prayer is sometimes exercised as a duty and a task; on its supreme planes it is eagerly resorted to as a joy. A part of the true conception of true intercession consists in giving pleasure to our God. To supplicate on behalf of another, and to do it with the reluctance and misgivings of a bondman, cannot be "wellpleasing unto the Lord." It is our high privilege to enter the Presence chamber like children going home; and to name our fellow-pilgrims with the happy assurance that the very intercession is consonant with "the river of God's pleasures." Thus "the joy of the Lord" will be our strength. Let us ever supplicate for others as though we had infinite resources in the goodwill of the Lord, and so let us "with joy draw water out of the wells of salvation."

"For your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now." Our spiritual comrades are among the choicest gifts of God's love. A warrior's courage is greatly heartened by the presence upon the field of one Valiant-for-the-truth. Our convictions are

enriched by the spectacle of others who live and dare in the same faith. The faith of the faithful is inevitably altruistic; it is an esprit de corps, a holy contagion, a vitalising energy in which every member is empowered unto God. And this influential contagion of assurance belongs especially to veteran campaigners who have been “in the fellowship of the gospel from the first day.” A well-seasoned and much-tried soldier is an invaluable asset among raw recruits; the men who have been through a battle impart calmness and confidence to an otherwise untried company.

“Being confident of this very thing, that He which began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ He who fashions the seed is also Lord of the Harvest. He creates initial impulse, and He also matures the character. The quickening ministries of the spring are His; His also are the ripening ministries of the autumn. He nourishes the tender sapling into the majestic oak, and the one gracious sunshine is showered upon both. He will not leave us in our spiritual babyhood, nor will He make us precociously old. He will “perfect us,” adding grace and strength to the growing years, and “everything” shall be beautiful in its season. There shall be “fruit every month,” and the fruit shall be appropriate to our growth. The good Lord who “began a work” will not leave it imperfect and futile. Most graciously will He perfect it, until concerning every one of us He is able to say, “I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart.” We are always optimistic about the people who dwell in our hearts. When they only dwell in the suburbs of our regards we soon lose hope concerning them — we easily become the prey of enfeebling fears. But when people have “a warm place in our hearts” the light of hope is never out of our sky. That is why mothers are optimistic about their boys when everybody else is in despair. They have them in their hearts. And that is why the Good Shepherd is an optimist concerning you and me; and that is why He leaves the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and goes out after that which is lost, “until He find it.” It is all because He has us in His heart. With what a “growing atmosphere” of hope we should enswathe one another if only we dwelt in one another’s hearts! A big hope is ever the child of passionate love.

“Inasmuch as, both in my bonds and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers with me of grace.” Here was a complexity of gracious bonds; a fourfold cord which could not be broken. No wonder the Apostle has them in his heart. They were one with him in suffering, “in bonds,” and there is no welding ministry like a common passage through grief and pain. They were one with him in vigorously defending the central citadel of the Christian Faith. And they were one with him in the strengthening of these central verities by the confirming vision of their own rich and glad experience. And, above all, they were one with him in a common sustenance. They were all sitting at one table, in the enjoyment of the one “feast of fat things they were partakers with him of grace. When the day comes that such language can be used of the modern Church, she will be seen to stride through the devil’s usurped and blasted dominions with irresistible and ever-triumphant strength.

“For God is my witness, how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus.” Paul is never afraid of calling upon the witness of the Almighty. Again and again he makes quiet and confident appeal for Divine confirmation of his own word. He lives in the secret place with the Lord, and the light of the Divine countenance fills all his affairs, just as the sunshine floods an open field. His sense of the sacred presence is unbroken; whenever or wherever he looks, he contemplates the face of the Almighty. And therefore everything is born in the light; nothing in his life is a fruit of the darkness. Everything is a child of light, and he dares to call upon the Lord to witness and confirm the glorious nobility of its birth. How many of us fear the witnessings of the Lord! We would hide ourselves from Him, and remove all our affairs from His searching beam. Blessed and thrice blessed is the life which is gloriously illumined in its “hidden parts” and which can humbly call upon the Lord to bear witness to the seals of His own grace.

And to what does he call the Lord to witness? “How I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus.” He claims to be in the heart of the Lord Jesus, and from that heart of all compassion, he yearns after the disciples of Philippi. His longings are in accord with the longings of his Saviour — the pulse of his desire beats with the pulse of the desires of his Lord. It is a wonderful claim, and he calls God to witness its reality and power. He dwells in the heart of Christ, and he shares His travail for the souls of men. He has a part in the strain and pang of redeeming labour; he is a “partaker of His sufferings he fills up “that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ.” No one can abide in Christ and not feel the burdensome drain of sacrificial desire.

FORTUNE OF MISFORTUNE

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment”
(Philippians 1:9-14).

True yearning will reveal itself in supplication. Our best desires for others instinctively pass into prayers. Indeed, we may test the quality of our longings for their good by the nature of the requests we make for them at the throne of grace. A longing is a poor earth-born and earth-inhabiting sentiment if it does not “mount up with wings as eagles,” and soar away to heaven’s gate. Paul’s yearnings for the Philippians ranged through the treasures of heaven, and sought its richest bounties. “I pray that your love may

abound . . . in knowledge." For love can be un-

illuminated, or only partially enlightened. There is a love which is dim and dull, whose vision is not clear and sunny, which sees men only "as trees walking."

There is love which is as candle-light; there is love which is as steady starlight; and there is love which is as the glorious splendour of the noonday sun. There is love without tact — a clumsy love devoid of skill, unattended by fine perception. This is the love of the first standard — an elementary, rudimentary affection, where the senses are only partially awake and operative. And there is the love of the advanced stages, equipped with more delicate instincts, feeling its way into the heart of things, and reading the secrets of things with most delicate perception. The Apostle prays that his readers may be led into these higher classes of the academy of love, that they may have more and more illuminating "knowledge" of God, and more and more "discernment" of one another's needs. And all this in order that they may "approve the things that are excellent." At present they could only appreciate the good; they were not sufficiently advanced to appreciate the better and, least of all, the best. But the Apostle prays that they make such progress as to be able to taste the "excellent" and appreciate its exquisite and delicate flavour. And there is nothing like love for giving the requisite palate; nay, love is the very organ itself. The real essences of life await the revealing presence of love, and the finer the love the richer will be the revelation. When our love is excellent, multitudinous excellences will reveal themselves on every side.

"That ye may be sincere, and void of offence unto the day of Christ With such an advancing love, and with growing and appreciated visions of glory, the character will become increasingly enriched. It will become more and more "sincere." How lofty and splendid is the standard! The word literally suggests a perfection so finished and profound that it reveals no stain or defect even to the inspecting quest of the sunlight. Rusty garments may pass muster in the subdued light of the winter, but their imperfections stand revealed in the fierce inquisitiveness of the summer sun. Our characters may appear respectable when judged by the dull standards and maxims of the world; they appear quite other when they stand in the blazing light of God's countenance. And yet it is to the favourable verdict of that severe and solemn examination that a perfected love is at last to bring us. Judged by the sun of righteousness and in "the day of Christ," we are to be "sincere," and "void of offence," with no hidden stumbling-block within us; no "secret fault," but every part of our being "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." If our love become enriched, if it be lit up and warmed by the grace of the Saviour, our whole being will become transfigured, and we shall awake at last, "in His likeness."

"Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel." What seemed to be a menace turned out to be a blessing; the cloud, which appeared so ominous, brought a gracious shower; the restriction became the mother of a larger liberty; the prison was the appointed place of richer and more glorious vision. How often the Apostle's experiences have been repeated in the lives of the Lord's saints! It has seemed at times as if calamity or enmity had checked and destroyed their ministry, but the morrow has proved that the threatening enemies have been transformed into generous friends. Bereavement has come to the family circle, and its work has appeared ruthless and blighting; notwithstanding, afterward, we have seen something of the gracious handiwork of God. Some time ago, I saw a railway embankment on fire, and the mercilessly invading flames were, inch by inch, consuming every blade of grass upon the slope, until a great area was black in unrelieved destruction. Some weeks later I passed by the same place, but instead of the scarred and blackened ruins there was a wide patch of fresh and most winsome green. Where the fire had burnt most fiercely the recreated slope was the most attractive. "The things that happened" unto it, "had fallen out rather unto the progress" of vegetation. "God is love," and therefore He is "a consuming fire."

"So that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest." We never know the real strength of a man's foundation until he is tested by the storm. Picnic weather does not reveal the sea-going powers of a liner; these are tested and made manifest by the tempest. When a man is brought into a tight corner, and every way of escape from sin or from despair seems closed, then we shall see the worth or worthlessness of his religion. As for the Apostle, the misfortune which he had feared became a minister of the kingdom; it became evident to those about him that his bonds were "in Christ"; his very manacles began to preach of the glorious bondage by which he was bound to his Lord. The soldiers who guarded him began to speak solemnly and whisperingly about their prisoner. It was perfectly plain that he was no ordinary man, and that he had amazing secret resources of strength and of courage which showed no sign of exhaustion in this day of high crisis and danger. These are the revelations which bring honour and glory to the Lord. When some sudden emergency flings our life into dark and tumultuous conditions, and we conduct ourselves so that men almost forget the tragedy in the contemplation of our total freedom from panic, and they ask one another "by what power" we do it, then do our "bonds in Christ" become manifest, and the Lord Himself is glorified.

"And most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, were more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear." Apparent misfortune is being transmuted into richer fortune still. The revelation of his own invincible attachment to Christ is making others bold. The timid hearted are putting on holy courage as they contemplate the glorious fortitude of Paul. The fruits of his distresses become spiritual stimulants to his brethren. This is one of the gracious mysteries of our Lord's seeming

severities. Who could have foretold that the means by which the disciples at Rome were to be heartened, would be by the imprisonment of the greatest of their leaders? And so we never know what sweetness will emanate from our bitterness, what liberty will spring from our servitude. The great Lord is over all. He is "mindful of His own," "He remembereth His children." He delights to bring the garden out of the desert; He rejoices to make the wilderness blossom like the rose.

BAD MOTIVES IN GOOD WORK

"Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife" (Philippians 1:15-19).

How fearful the combination. A gracious evangel may be upon the lips, and a most unlovely motive in the heart; the boat may be all right, but the devil may be at the helm. We may "preach Christ" for the sake of winning a selfish victory, or of gratifying an envious and quarrelsome spirit. We may use our Lord's gospel just to deck our brow with controversial garlands, to humiliate our opponents, and to bring eclat to an ecclesiastical sect. The envious hand may deal out the waters of life! It is possible for a denomination to open a church in a neighbourhood, not primarily for the glory of the Lord, but just to preoccupy the ground before another denomination appears. Churches are frequently built as the outcome of angry divisions. We can preach the gospel of love in a bad temper; pride can dictate the proclamation of peace. All these are amazing and almost incredible conjunctions, but daily experience brings them before us in near and depressing reality. On every hand we can see men using the Lord's gun, while the aim is directed by the devil. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife."

"And some also of good will." The black hand has not always hold of the white robe. The Lord's messenger frequently shares the Lord's spirit; the desire of the heart accords with the evangel of the lips. There is no hidden poison, no dark and unclean secret pool. Such men "preach Christ," and they glory in the gospel, and all the inner bias of their life is firmly set toward the honour of the Lord. They have no private aim, no ulterior purpose, no selfish "feathering of their own nest"; all their motives are Christianised and refined, and every piece of shining armour, every consecrated power, is eagerly placed at the disposal of their King.

"The one do it of love." Their service is born of love, like a river issuing out of a lake. Love is the very central power in their life, and everything takes its rise in its profound and lucid depths. This is the birthplace of all the soul's activities; nothing is born elsewhere. Its hopes, its desires, its designs, its endeavours are all created in love and "of love," and therefore they all harmonise with the glad tidings of our Lord Jesus Christ. How infinite is the contrast between these love-possessed and loverefined souls, and those who "proclaim Christ of faction, not sincerely"; doing it from shallow and irritable partisanship, with no sincerity in their hearts, but everything cheapened and defiled by the base alloy of self-seeking and irreligious jealousy. Such unclean labours are ever accompanied by a certain insensitiveness, and frequently by a purposed and successful cruelty. "Thinking to raise up affliction for me in my bonds." If only they could injure Paul, and make his chains to gall him, their evil desires would be gratified, and they would rest in the consciousness of something done.

"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." The Apostle is gloriously optimistic. Even in the midst of these evil-motivated men Christ is talked about, even though the devil has hidden himself in the messenger's heart; and the devil's ministry shall be frustrated and nullified, and the proclamation of the Gospel shall have free course and be glorified. The Holy Spirit shall contrive against the devil's "God shall make the wrath of man to praise Him." A mystic antiseptic influence shall play upon the speech of the jealous-minded ambassador, and it shall become a minister of health and healing, and shall accomplish purposes quite other than he ever dreamed. "My word shall not return unto me void," even when it is spoken by a man whose heart is a bitter pool of envy and strife. Not because of such a man, but in spite of such a man shall Christ our Lord be glorified. Let the story of the Saviour's love be made known, and the very word itself shall be energised by the Spirit, and it shall fall as a seed of life into some dead and barren soil, and there shall come a resurrection and a great awakening. "And therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." And well he may, and well we all may! The devil is awake, but our Lord is more awake. Sin abounds, but grace doth much more abound. "He bringeth the devices of the wicked to nought," and "He getteth unto Himself the victory."

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation." It shall all end well. The great Apostle is in captivity at Rome. His surroundings are hostile. His plans are all thrown into confusion, and his far-reaching missionary campaign has been ruthlessly checked. But the apparent circumstances are not all the circumstances. Beneath the transient there is the eternal; within the frowning antagonisms there works the hidden friendship of God. At present circumstances may seem to march against him with the bristling threatening armaments of an overbearing foe. But there shall be a "turn," things shall receive a mysterious twist; an unseen but friendly hand shall guide the hostile hosts, and instead of being the ministers of destruction, they shall become the agents of a larger good. "I know that this shall turn to my salvation." And how is this gracious turning of circumstances to be brought about? What are the ministries which are to effect the transformation? The Apostle mentions them. "Through your supplications." The men and women in Philippi are to play an influential part in changing the influence of the circumstances in Rome. It is a marvellously daring association

of ideas. Rome was the very heart of imperial power, and all the forces of empire seemed to be moving in opposition to the Apostle Paul. And yet this little company of obscure men and women in Philippi have a lever in their hands which can divert the battalions of unfriendly circumstances to a friendly and undreamed-of end! And this lever is the great prerogative of prayer. Has the Church of Christ adequately realised the vast wealth of her spacious inheritance? She has a power which can raze mountains to their base, and divert the channels* of the floods. "And the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." This is the second of the great ministries made possible by the first. Our prayers cut channels for the river of God's gracious Spirit. No sincere prayer ever fails. It cuts a path for God; it prepares "the way of the Lord." And therefore the Christians at Philippi were sacredly qualified to minister to the great Apostle at Rome, and to be the means of enriching him with amazing supplies of the Divine grace. And so it came to pass that the circumstances at Rome could be deflected and "turned to salvation" by a company of humble saints, who were praying in some obscure home in a distant city.

THE SOUL IN STRAITS

"For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21-26).

Only get hold of a man's conception of life and you have the master-key to his career. Amid the multitudinous hosts of his designs and purposes this is the ruling one. What he thinks of life is the sovereign ideal which occupies the throne of his life. Everything else is minor and subservient, and the quality of its servitude is determined by the character of the monarch on the throne. To some men "life" is money. Money absorbs all its interests and activities; money is its centre and circumference. To some men "life" is fame. Apart from popularity life is devitalised; the loss of reputation is the beginning of death. To other men "life" is pleasure. It is measured by sensations. The fair scene, the pleasant sound, the fragrant odour, the delicious flavour, the ecstatic thrill, — these are the real symptoms of life in excelsis, and when these are absent nothing remains which is worthy of the name. But here is the great Apostle joyfully declaring that his conception of "life" is synonymous with "Christ." He has no thought of life apart from Christ. Nothing is alive from which the Lord is exiled. His absence is death. All things are alive in which the Saviour dwelleth. "Everything shall live whither the river cometh." An apparent trifle burns with the fire immortal when it is in communion with the Infinite. A common courtesy shines with the light eternal when it is possessed by the grace of our Lord. Really to live, to be gloriously alive, is to fill everything with Christ — to begin everything in Christ, to end everything in Christ. Wherever the great Apostle turned, he looked for the Lord; Christ must set His seal upon all his means, as Christ must determine all his ends.

"And to die is gain." And the one is the fruitful sequence to the other. If "life" is Christ, then everything that unveils Christ to me shall make me more alive. And therefore death itself must be counted among my friends, for doth not death remove the concealing veil, the "muddy vesture" of the body, the obstructing mist, and usher us into the clear, sweet noon-day of His presence, who is "the resurrection and the life"? Thrice blessed is the man who, when he is thus making up the balance-sheet of his circumstances, can confidently put death to the credit account, and number it among his gains. The men whose conception of life is swallowed up in money and fame and pleasure and ease must inevitably place death to the debit side of their estimates, for to them death must come as a mere destructive, an unappeasable foe, the "last enemy," who shall plunge all their fairest designs into pathetic and final confusion. To the Apostle Paul death was not a damp and darksome cul-desac, where all our treasures rot away in swift corruption; it was a place of gracious transition, "a covered way that leadeth into light." "But if to live in the flesh, — if this is the fruit of my zwork, then what I shall choose I wot not." If everything brings Christ, and life has no meaning and sweetness apart from Christ, how difficult would be the alternatives if we were left to make our choice! Should we decide to strike our tents, and go home to the Lord, or should we choose to so jura a little longer "in the earthly house of our tabernacle," and continue in the pilgrimage of time? Life in time, with the Lord, will be strong and serviceable; life in eternity will abound in developing wonder and in fruitful rest. "I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake." And, really, this is the condition of all sensitive Christian souls; they feel the double tugging, the strange, strong "pull" of the day of unveiling, when they shall see their Pilot "face to face," and the mystic "pull" of the immediate day, where their Lord, in the "travail of His soul," is labouring in the needs and strivings of their fellow-men. They hear Him calling from the realms of rest; they hear Him calling from the fields of service. But the two calls are by no means antagonistic, neither do they tear the heart asunder. They are gloriously complementary, and one just feeds and corroborates the other. The far-away call from the land of rest only nerves and inspires the Apostle to more ardent and strenuous toil. He becomes more confident in his apostleship, and in the Lord's own ordination of his labours.

"And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, yea, and abide with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith." The Lord will make it clear to us where our duty lies, and will keep our feet in the appointed road. If "to live is Christ," we shall not be kept in uncertainty as to where he would have us be. Some need will call to us with a voice which we cannot misinterpret, and we shall be confident that just here is the place of ministry prepared for us. Paul had this restful confidence, and although his listening spirit caught the sweet strains of the Homeland, the inviting sounds did not paralyse him; they rather nerved his hands for the immediate

task. And what a labour it was — to abide with needy people for their “progress and joy in the faith,” to lead them into the advanced stages of the school, where irksome discipline changes into a fruitful liberty, where the sense of duty ripens into rich joy, and where the small ideal is transformed into visions of unspeakable glory. Surely all this is worth waiting for; surely it is worth while keeping the tent up a little longer before we pull up the pegs, and go home. To have helped somebody a few steps along the heavenly road, to have infused a little more holy courage into their spirits, to have given a more exuberant swing to their stride, — these services abundantly justify a delay in the journey, and will assure for us a more glorious welcome in our Father’s house. And so the great Apostle settles down to his holy calling with the heavenly strain singing in his ears, and with this desire possessing his heart : “That your glory may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again.” .

THE HEAVENLY CITIZEN

“Let your citizenship be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27, 28).

The country towards which we travel ought to be recognised by our life. It ought to be evident that we are citizens of the heavenly kingdom by the very gait with which we move about our common affairs. We ought to carry our very climate about with us, as we move in the stifling or chilling atmospheres of the world. People should breathe more freely when we draw near. Hearts and consciences should awake as though they felt the blowing of their native air. And there ought to be a freshness and buoyancy in our intercourse which shall proclaim to all men that we are enjoying the franchise and privileges of the city of God. The redeemed of the Lord must not move about like slaves, their faces clouded with fear, as though the lash may suddenly fall upon their shoulders, or some awful abyss open at their very feet. Our entire intercourse with the world must be “worthy of the gospel of Christ”; and, as that gospel is an evangel of light and life and power and peace, our souls must reveal themselves as vitalised and illumined, and exulting in a restful glory. But how frequently the Lord’s disciples are miserable advertisements of His grace. Some years ago, in a certain northern town, I saw a street lamp exceedingly dirty and dingy, from which there hung an inscribed index hand, pointing the way to the municipal baths! And we have seen its analogy in the Christian Church. Unclean lives proclaim the powers of the kingdom of purity and light, and the defiled garment puts the Saviour to shame. The messenger is not worthy of the message, and therefore the message itself is treated with derision and contempt. Our citizenship is not “worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

“That, whether I come and see you or be absent ...” There are many Christians who seem as though they cannot live without sensations. When the special convention is being held, their devotion and regularity are admirable; but when the special speakers have gone home again, and the multitudes have melted away, and there is just the little church or chapel left, and the average minister, and the common round of Christian labours, they become lax and lukewarm, and they frequently degenerate into cynics, and assiduously practise the perilous exercises of criticism and censure. Paul recognised the danger, and he faithfully proclaimed it. Blessed and thrice blessed is the Christian who accustoms himself to find his bread in the ways of the commonplace, who can be faithful without sensations, and who realises in humble fellowships the sweet companionship of the Lord.

“That I may hear of your state, that ye stand fast in one spirit.” That is the glory of the true soldier, whether he be found among many comrades, and heartened by the music of the band, or whether he be engaged in lowly sentinel duty, in the cold, silent watches of the night, — it is his glory to “stand fast,” to hold his ground. Our posts may be many and varied, but our spirit can be one. We can hold the country for Emmanuel if everybody holds his corner. The “thick of the fight” for everybody is just where everybody is placed, and just there our first trophies can be won. Do not let us loiter at our post, or saunter about in sightless indolence, because some comrade has gone away, some conspicuous disciple on whom we had leaned; do not let us despise our post, or treat it flippantly or carelessly where we could do better and braver work, and which are held by feeble men. Our part is to hold our bit of ground, to “stand fast,” and to see to it, by the help of God, that the whole kingdom is not endangered by breaches made in our position, but that when the enemy assails us he may find he is hurling himself against invincible rock.

“With one soul striving for the faith of the gospel.” Even though we may sometimes think ourselves to be fighting alone, solitary soldiers at obscure or distant outposts, we are part of a vast and solid army, one in the fires of noble affection, one in the enthusiasm of a glorious passion, one in the sacred enterprise of striving in concert with the faith. No man can absolutely blight and destroy the power of the gospel. He may maim it, he may impoverish it, but he cannot take its life. A preacher whose soul is unclean, and who is disloyal to his Lord, cannot altogether devitalize the power of his own message. “My word shall not return unto me void.” But how amazingly is the message helped when the messenger strives in concert with it. It is as though two warriors were strenuously engaged upon a common task, and one cheers and invigorates the other. This is our privilege, as this is our dignity, to be “fellow-labourers with God,” and in this supreme fellowship we enter into the joy of the Lord.

THE PRIVILEGE OF SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

“Because to you it hath been granted in the behalf of Christ , not only to believe on Him , but also to suffer in His behalf” (Philippians 1:29, 30)

And so there are gradations of privilege, and the fairest garlands are won on the harvest fields. In the world the coveted “plums” are the places of ease, and men are accounted lucky in proportion as they attain to a leisured indolence. But in the kingdom of our Lord ease is placed at discount, and the lucky ones are those who are privileged to suffer in His behalf. I have sometimes heard men confess with real gratitude that they have been “greatly favoured,” inasmuch as they have never experienced an hour of suffering. And, indeed, it is a favour, but quite an elementary one, a favour of the first standard, and not belonging to the more advanced endowments among the gifts of grace. For here is the superlative favour, to be appointed a sufferer “in the behalf of Christ”; these are the favoured ones in the family, who “bear the marks of the Lord Jesus,” and who “fill up that which is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.” So that when the fisherman seer lifts his astonished eyes upon the most conspicuous presences in the multitude of the blest, the radiant ones with their white, shining robes and their palms of triumph and their exultant songs, and wonderingly asks who they are, and whence came they to this glorious eminence, he is told that they “came out of great tribulation,” they have been among the suffering warriors in the marching hosts, and are “therefore” now “before the throne of God.” The bloody track led to the heights; crucifixion led to the throne. We shall therefore have to revise our standards and judgments, and pay reverence to all sufferers for Christ’s sake as the very bodyguard and most immediate companions of the Lord.

“It hath been granted ... to suffer.”

It is a sort of royal warrant, a divine election to a sacred office. We are accustomed to think of men receiving the royal favour to preach and to evangelise, and to make a path of light to peoples far away. But here is the supreme distinction, the royal grant “to suffer”! And it is just this consciousness of divine election which makes many a sufferer fill the midnight with his songs. It was in the midnight, when Paul and Silas were smarting under the scourge, that they “sang praises unto God,” and the prisoners heard them. Our great missionary, Dr. Griffith John, has told us that one day, when he was surrounded by a hostile Chinese crowd, and violence was used, he put up his hand to his smitten face, and when he withdrew it, and saw it bathed in blood, he was possessed by an extraordinary sense of exaltation, and he rejoiced that he had been “counted worthy to suffer for His name.” David Hill records a similar experience of unspeakable ecstasy, when his hand hung limp from a brutal blow. But, indeed, the witnesses are multitudinous; they can be found in every corner of the great fields of service, suffering men and women, wearing their scars like medals, feeling as though there had been conferred upon them some heavenly title and degree, and stepping out in the assured companionship of the once crucified but risen Lord.

“Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.” And so the Apostle and his Philippian brethren were kinsmen in suffering; they were fellow-gladiators, contending with the fierce hostilities of the world. Our mutual sympathies are deepened when we pass through common suffering. When soldiers have fought together, their relationships are transfigured. A Church which never engages in a stern and bloody warfare with the devil can never know the real mystery of the “communion of saints.” It is the suffering ranks who best know the secret of the Lord, and who experience vital union in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost. “Partakers of the sufferings,” they are also “partakers of the consolation,” and in that rich festivity heart leaps to heart in generous recognition. There are hidden treasures in the life and teachings of the Apostle Paul which will never be unveiled to us, and which we can never share, until we have “the same conflict” which we see in him, and share his sufferings with the Lord. These underground correspondences are exceeding wealthy, and nothing but the agonies born of great moral and spiritual crusades can ever make them operative. We may well pray that we may be counted worthy to enter into these buried treasures by having it granted unto us “to suffer in His behalf.” “I will give unto these the treasures of darkness.” When life is a mere picnic, its pleasures are shallow and superficial, and the deeper joys are never touched. When Marie Antoinette was going to her wedding in Notre Dame, she gave orders that all cripples and beggars, and everything savouring sorrow and calamity, should be removed from the road, in order that her marriage bliss might be pure and unalloyed felicity. It was a short-sighted and perverse expedient. Marie Antoinette was unconsciously violating one of the venerable laws of the moral universe, and she was taking the surest means of diluting and impoverishing her own happiness. Felicity is not gained by avoiding suffering, but by sharing it. We reach our Olivet of ascension by the darker height of Calvary. If Marie Antoinette had given special care and service to crippled folks on her wedding morn, and had sought to ease their yoke and make their burden light, she would have been amazed at the warm sunny radiance with which the Lord would have visited her own heart, and the wedding bells would have rung a merrier peal in her ears. “If any man would be My disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.” “These things have I said unto you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

FORCES WHICH MAKE FOR CONCORD

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship

of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Philippians 2:1, 2)

Christian union is far more than an unbroken skin. It does not find its symbol in some fine texture of green tender lawn which impartially clothes soils of great variety. It is not surface-sameness; it is vital spiritual kinship. It is not a common label; it is a common heart. And therefore the Apostle, in making his appeal for peace and concord, names the profound realities in which they are born, and in which alone they can be sustained.

"If there is therefore any comfort in Christ." That is the basal chord in all possible spiritual harmonies. There must be a personal experience and knowledge of the Lord, which acts upon the life like an "exhortation," moving it with all the force of persuasive eloquence. To seek to establish Christian union upon any other foundation is to build it upon shifting sand. A common ritual is only a rope of sand, and a fierce blow of adversity may scatter the apparent unity into dire confusion. A common organisation is only a mechanical order, and is ever exposed to the corroding rust of time and to many a violent foe. And a common creed, even though it use the clamps of prejudice and virulent passion, can never constitute a family such as is purposed by our Lord. All these are only phantom unions, mere counterfeits of the glorious reality. The first requisite to brotherly concord is a "secret" between the individual soul and the Saviour, a partaking of the "hidden manna," a compelling and "comforting" intercourse in the quiet and innermost chambers of the life.

"If any consolation of love." When the soul has sat at the "feast of fat things," and has tasted and seen "how gracious the Lord is," there will surely arise the incentive of an all-constraining love. Love is not the product of small obediences; it is born of a great companionship. "We love because He first loved us." No one can explain the mystery of love. Etymology cannot take us a single inch on the way to the secret clue. The soul comes into certain conditions, and the mystic fire is kindled. At one moment the outlook is grey and cold and commonplace; the next moment it is brimming with sunshine, and full of colour, and resounding with song. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new!" When love is born in the soul, life beats with a new pulse, with a new impulse, and man goes out to meet his brother.

"If any fellowship of the Spirit." Love is the spiritual organ, and by its ministry we have exquisite correspondences with the Eternal. In wireless telegraphy the transmitter and the receiver are, as it were, tuned to the same key; if this identity is lost, the fellowship is destroyed. And love is fellow-feeling with God, and where it rules in sovereign power there is marvellous telepathic communion with the Divine. He speaks and we listen, we speak and He hears, and between us there is a ceaseless commerce in holy request and intimation. Outsiders may know nothing about this sacred communion, just as the outsider may know nothing about the wireless messages which are speeding through space, but all who are attuned know its reality, and rejoice in the gracious experience. And no man can be in secret and constant correspondence with the Spirit and not be moved in tender and chivalrous quest of man. The "friend of God" will yearn after lonely men everywhere; he will be "a friend of publicans and sinners."

"If any tender mercies and compassions." Yes, he will put out the most exquisite feelers to the frail and sore places in human life. He will lift the weary, and touch their wounds with the expertness of assured discernment. His pity will surprise those to whom it is given, and the pity will redeem them. There is nothing more needed in the world than just this fine endowment of illumined compassion. Many of us can weep, but there is no light or sight in our tears. The compassion which is not blind, which is "full of eyes," is very rare, but it is a ministry of blessed and mighty power. "And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in discernment." This all-seeing tenderness will assuredly belong to those who move in intimate companionship with the Lord. If we abide in Him, our whole body will be "full of light."

"Fulfil ye my joy." Some joy they had already given him, but now the Apostle asks that his joy may be perfected, and filled to overflowing. Not that his joy in the Lord was thin and scanty; that flowed on like a river in flood, carrying all obstacles before it. But in addition to our joy in God, there is another joy-channel which can only be filled by our fellows, and that only in certain prescribed conditions. Our God has determined that man shall share with him the service of filling the river-courses of human happiness, and it is solely because of men's disobedience and superficiality that the channels are empty, like dry and bleached river-beds in time of drought. But, surely, if Paul's Philippian correspondents have enjoyed the experiences which he has just described, they are abundantly qualified to fill the river-courses up to the brim! If they have secretly known the Lord, if love is begotten and active, if they have tender intimacies with the Holy Spirit, and if they are possessed by most sensitive compassions, then surely their lives will flow over into other lives in joyful and joy-creating flood. And in the Christian Church such generous resource will operate precisely as the Apostle describes. It will be created of a glorious solidarity.

"That ye be of the same mind." And this solidarity shall have these gracious characteristics. First, it shall be a fellowship not constituted of a common hatred, but of a common love, not of negative resentment to a foe, but of a positive affection to the Lord: "having the same love." And, secondly, it shall be a concord in which all the affections shall be in perfect harmony, the entire emotional life co-operating like the sweetest strains of powerful music: "being of one accord." And, thirdly, it shall be dominated and illumined by a common purpose, all the activities of the brotherhood aiming at one great and sovereign end: "of one mind." Such is the mighty concord born of secret experience with the Lord.

THE THINGS OF OTHERS

“Let nothing be done through faction or vainglory (Philippians 2:3, 4).

The Apostle lays his condemnatory hand upon two very perverse and perverting spirits, the party spirit and the spirit of personal vanity. Many men are passionately devoted to party who care nothing at all about truth. It is so in political strife. Men become feverish in controversy, passionate in declamation; they labour night and day for a triumph, and when the triumph has been won they relapse into lethargy, and the sacred cause of the kingdom is forgotten and ignored. They are not chivalrous knights in a great crusade; they are small squabblers in a petty campaign. They fume for a trifle; they are cold to the august. They fight to conquer an enemy, not to emphasise a truth. And so it is in the Christian Church. Our sectarianisms often eclipse our Christianity. The shrine is valued more than the faith, the letter more than the spirit, the man-made more than the God-born. Even while we serve, our eyes are not upon our Master that we may reflect His beauty; they are rather upon another company of believers, that by our competition we may trouble their progress. Yea, and many things are “done through faction.” And equally true is it that many things are done through “vainglory.” The applause of men is more pleasant and welcome than the presence of God. We appropriate to ourselves the glory which alone belongs to Him. We become termini rather than thoroughfares, ends in ourselves rather than ministers of God. Half tremblingly I write the words — we sit in the place of God, and “deck ourselves in majesty,” and take His dues. It is a transient sovereignty and as shallow as it is brief. Let us humbly seek the good Spirit of God that He may deliver us from both fatalities — from the destructive fever of faction, and from the diseased conceit of vanity.

“But in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself.” Yes, our defence against these perilous usurpations of the Divine prerogative must be sought in “lowliness of mind.” And how beautiful is the grace which is here described! Behind the word which is translated “lowliness” is our word “tapestry,” and I think I shall not be far away from the Apostle’s mind when I say that he counsels us to lay our life down like a soft tapestry carpet — in kindly thoughts and gracious sympathies and helpful services, in order that the weary, bruised feet of other people may find ease and comfort on the road. For some of the ways of life are very rough and flinty, and the sharp jagged edges of circumstances cut the feet most sorely, and “going” is for many people a matter of ceaseless pain. It is the blessed privilege of Christians to lay a soft surface on the roads, by spreading over them the graciousness of tender compassions, so stooping that other pilgrims can “walk over us” and so forget the hardships of the way. That is surely the secret of “lowliness of mind,” it is the very opposite to the spirit of haughtiness and pride, a spirit which multiplies the difficulties of others, and terribly aggravates the agonies of the road. And how different is all this to the mood of the “natural man,” and to the principle by which he orders his goings. With him it is ever “the weakest to the wall,” crushed against the wall by the thoughtless, brutal energy of the strong. With him “might is right,” and the “first come” must be “first served.” With the Christian the first to be served is the brother, for the Christian counts “other better than himself.” He makes a place for him, shares his interests, and seeks to guide his feet into the ways of pleasantness and peace.

“Not looking each of you on his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” The measure of our Christian growth may be estimated by the circles of our sympathetic interest. What is the circumference of our outlook? Are my sympathies represented by my umbrella, and do they merely cover myself? Or are they something like a garden tent, and do they cover a family? Or are they like a great marquee, and can all the people in the village find shelter beneath its roof? Or still grander and nobler, do they find their symbol in the overarching firmament, and do they embrace, “all nations and kindreds, and peoples and tongues”? What is the scope of my sympathetic circle? They tell us that the concentric rings in the interior fibre of a tree record its age and the story of its growth. And most sure I am that the concentric rings in the soul-interests of a Christian tell the story of his growth in grace. How large is the circle of our prayers? How many of “the things of others” find hospitality in our fervent petitions? Are they mostly concerned with “our own things,” or do they reach out to grasp the needs of a race? Have our prayers grown with our years, or is it the same little ring which characterised our childhood? If a man’s prayers do not grow bigger and deeper and more unselfish every year, there is something wrong with his roots. And as it is with our prayers, so it is with our services. How far does our beneficence reach? Over what distance do we feel the pangs of the race? Can we hear the call from afar? Can we hear “a cry from Macedonia”? Or is the far-off land a silent land in which we have no interest, and to which we render no service? If that be so, then we need the great Renewer to “restore our souls,” to open out the blocked senses, to clear away the impediments from the highways of our life, in order that we may have ready communion with our brother, a quick and intimate correspondence with his joy and pain. “And a highway shall be there, and a way.” Yes, our Lord is a great maker of roads, and if we only place ourselves entirely in His hands, He will open out to us the unvisited needs in our brother’s life, so that we shall look not only on “our own things,” but also “on the things of others.”

THE MIND THAT WAS IN CHRIST JESUS

“Let this mind be in you , which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5-11)

That is the only likeness which is truly fundamental. It is the only affinity which reveals real kinship. When we have the mind of anybody we share the very springs of their being. It is so much more than a resemblance in detached and single habits; it is to have their way of feeling, their way of doing things. It is to be like them in the pattern-chamber of the life, where conduct is originally fashioned, and where all the outside issues are finally determined. It means that our chambers of imagery are furnished alike, that we are “one in the secret things we contemplate and love.” If we are like anybody in mind, we shall resemble them in everything. And is it not full of gracious inspiration that the possibility is held before us of sharing “the mind of Christ”? It is possible that, even though the walls of our minds be covered with unclean imagery, or with conceptions altogether misproportioned and untrue, they can be completely refurnished, and graced and glorified by “the things of Christ.” We can be “renewed and transfigured in mind.”

“Who, being in the form of God.” Our Saviour Christ shared the essential attributes of the Divine. It will be an ill day for us when we belittle our conception of the Lord. A small Saviour invariably means a cheap redemption. If there be nothing behind and beyond the Carpenter of Nazareth, then He takes His place in the common ranks of the long succession of prophets; His ministry is just the crusade of the ordinary reformer, and His progress is but the march to a martyr’s crown. If we would touch the unique and awful mystery of Calvary, we must reverently move beyond the regions of Nazareth and Bethlehem into “the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” It is in that supernal glory that we begin to feel the awe inspiring significance of the Crucifixion. Before our Saviour was “born in Bethlehem of Judea,” He was “in the form of God”; it is there we must stand, in reverent imagination, if we would even faintly realise the mysteriousness of the cries upon the Cross. If this previous glory be forgotten or eclipsed, Calvary becomes a common execution.

“Counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself.” Our Saviour did not clutch at His Divine prerogatives, clinging to them with avidity, and ambitiously displaying His equality with God. Love is always sacrificial; it sacrifices majesty and dignities for the sake of lowly service. To clothe another in fine raiment love lays aside its own imperial robe. When love is in the heart, greatness delights to walk unrecognised. Had our Lord approached us in the awful attire of His heavenly splendours He would never have got near to us. Our fear would have closed our doors, and we should never have dared to ask Him to “abide with us,” and to eat with us at a common board. His very glory would have been His bar. But He “emptied Himself.” And that was the beginning of a marvellous self-renunciation which culminated upon Calvary. He “emptied Himself,” He stripped Himself of the glories of heaven in order that He might not terrify and paralyse the men on earth whom He came to save. A little while ago a great cricketer, whose tremendous bowling is known throughout the world, might have been seen in a tiny garden playing cricket with a little fellow not five years old. But the swift bowler had emptied himself and was tossing the lightest, gentlest balls to suit the feebleness of his little playmate.

“Taking the form of a servant.” And in that form, though He did not make us afraid, He held us in continuous wonder. “He took a towel,” the apron of the slave, “and girded Himself and began to wash the disciples’ feet.” And this was the menial service He loved, and in which He daily rejoiced. What is the distance between this on the one hand — “In the form of God,” and this on the other hand — “He took a towel and girded Himself”? It is the descent from the throne to the footstool. He clothed Himself in the characteristics of a slave, “being made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man , He humbled Himself.” Still deeper is the descent in this self-imposed degradation: He strides down the steps into the lowest conditions in which man can be found, determined to touch the bottom, “becoming obedient unto death,” the grim presence which every other man has to obey, tasting its bitterness, drinking its cup, “yea, the death of the Cross.” Death at its worst! The death of a common malefactor, a death not only attended with the intensest suffering, but also with intensest shame. And this is the vast reach of our Lord’s condescension; He stooped even lower than the footstool of the slave, even to a humiliation which many escaped, that, in experiencing the deepest sorrows of our earthly lot, He might become our Saviour and our acknowledged Lord.

“Wherefore also God highly exalted Him.” He is back now to the throne! As is the humiliation, so also is the exaltation. “And gave unto Him the name which is above every name” — a rank and dignity which none of the sons of men can ever share. For whatever may be our privileges and attainments in grace He will always be beyond us, the superlative excellence, the origin and fountain of all our own. Our proudest title will be dim compared with His; it will be as mild sunshine in contrast with the blazing splendour of the resplendent sun. “That in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth.” Everything shall pay homage to Him on bended knee — all creation, all things whatsoever, and wheresoever they be. “And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Such is the doxology that the whole world will join in singing to our ascended and glorified Lord/

WORKING OUT ONE’S OWN SALVATION

“Wherefore, my beloved , as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only , but now much more in my

absence, work out your own salvation" (Philippians 2:12, 13)

And that introductory word "wherefore" dares to link our little life with the glorious life of our exalted Lord. The Apostle fixes his wondering gaze upon the humility of the Lord Jesus as He moves from the throne to the footstool, and enters into human lot, and stepping into our coldest needs touches even the chills and the darkness of death. "Wherefore," with this silent-compelling glory of the Lord before our eyes, "work out your own salvation." And indeed the way of sacrifice is the only appointed road of salvation. It is only by descending into another man's lot, and lifting him out of his difficulty, that we can possibly raise ourselves. In the Christian life it is pre-eminently true that to stoop is to conquer.

The heavenly road seems to go down, but the descent is the secret of ascension. We "take root downward," but only in order that we may "bear fruit upward." "No man, by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature," but this is precisely what he can do if only he is "taking thought" for others. If we take upon us "the form of a servant," we shall most assuredly acquire the mien and majesty of the monarch. Wondrous things emerge in our own character while we seek to serve and beautify our brother. All strength which is consecrated to the service of others reacts upon our own powers, and incites and develops them. Our spiritual powers are like bulbs which are ours as the gifts of God's grace, but in multitudes of lives they remain like bulbs in the florist's window, unopened and unrevealed. They are not "worked out," and this because we have not brought the right ministry to bear upon them — we have not provided the requisite conditions. The man who never descends into the lot of others, among the sorrow-stricken, or the fallen, deprives himself of the very elements which he needs for the fertilisation of his own powers. If we are to "work out" ourselves, it is absolutely essential that we should be workers for others. We can never share in the exaltation of our Lord unless in our own degree we share the pain and weariness of His humiliation.

"Now this that He ascended, what is it but that He first of all descended?" "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling And this is the mood in which we are to do our service, but we may at once assure ourselves that it is not the cringing, fearful mood of the slave. Our Father does not want slaves about His feet; He seeks sons and daughters, moving in "the glorious liberty of the children of God." He does not wish us to creep in fear along life's way, as though at any moment we might feel the lash about our shoulders. "Henceforth I call you not bond-servants but friends." But there is the fear of the lover as well as the fear of the slave, and this is a fear which only heightens and clarifies our joy. The lover is tremblingly sensitive to his loved one's presence. He knows the wish of the dear one before it is uttered. The birth of the desire marks the beginning of his service. He is like a most delicate "receiver" which trembles at the impact of the faintest vibration and registers its approach. And such is to be our sensitiveness to the presence and will of our God. We are to be so delicately sensitive towards Him as to discern the faintest indication of His purpose. We are to be like aspen leaves in the light breath of a summer's morning; we are to be sensible of His breathings. We are not to work among our fellows and lose the "love-touch" with our God. We are to keep ourselves tremblingly alert to the Eternal, in order that in any and in every moment we may receive the message of the Eternal mind. And so it is not the servility of the slave which is enjoined in the words "with fear and trembling." It is the exquisite responsiveness of the devoted lover.

"For it is God which worketh in you." Amid all our working God is not passive. He is no mere spectator; He is a fellow-labourer with the saints. We are called upon to be tremblingly alert because our God is ever about and within us in wonder-working ministry. It is only possible for us to "work out" in proportion as He "works in." He worketh in us "to will." The initial impulse is of His creation. No decree is born which is not the offspring of His brooding over us. Every holy initiative springs from Him, and from Him alone. But holy impulse might only mock us if we were denied the requisite power for its maturity. Desire would only add to our burden if there were no possibility of attainment. Far better be without the impulse if we can never reach the goal. But our God worketh in us, "to will and to do," He "inspires the earliest impulse," He "directs the final achievement." He creates the desire, and provides the resource for its accomplishment. He creates the hunger, and He supplies the bread. He conveys to us, by the ministry of His good Spirit, the power to do, the power to become, the power to realise the amazing purposes of "His good pleasure."

This is a word abounding in inspiration. It offers both life and light for our ministry in the service of others. The Valley of Humility is an exceedingly gracious place if we walk it in the fear of the Lord. It is not a stony waste, but a garden full of fair and fragrant flowers, with the birds singing on every side. Let us descend its slopes, and we shall not have taken many steps before we shall find some of the sweet "lilies of peace" growing about our feet.

THE SPIRIT OF REPINING

"Do all things without murmurings and disputings" (Philippians 2:14-16)

The Apostle here puts his finger upon the two tempers which so frequently mar and ruin our Christian service — the spirit of repining, which robs our labour of all sweetness, and the spirit of wrangling, which despoils it of all holy strength. We go out to the work of salvation, but our enterprise is nipped and frozen at the heart. We set about it with "murmurings." The wheels are not

working smoothly in “the oil of joy”; they grate and grind in the grit of a hard reluctance. There is a halfbackward pull in all our movements, and our goings do not attain to a splendid and irresistible crusade. I am more and more convinced that reluctance in service can be traced to want of praise in our prayers. Men take to duty sadly because they do not sing enough in the presence of their Lord. The murmur in labour is born of murmur in prayer. We come to our God with our complaints, with the sad story of our surging needs; but we do not come nearly often enough with our songs, gladly rehearsing our benefits in “the light of His countenance.” Many cry “God be merciful!” who never shout “God be praised!” We do not come before Him “in the multitude of His mercies,” but rather in the multitude of our complaints. Our feeble song is almost drowned in the clamour of our wailing. Now, amendment must begin here if we would have our labour march to music. We must go into the Lord’s presence, and very deliberately count our blessings. We must tell the story slowly, in order that our souls may take it in. We must repeat the story until our hearts glow in the contemplation, until we have changed the “spirit of heaviness” for the “garment of praise.” As soon as praise warms up our prayers, eagerness will warm up our service. When our lips are laden with the confession of God’s mercies, our feet will be swift in “the waj’ of His commandments.” We shall do all things “without murmurings.”

And then there is the second mood to which the Apostle refers, and which so frequently destroys the efficacy of Christian service — the spirit of wrangling. There are some people who appear to be incapable of doing anything without quarrelling over it. They turn everything into a controversy. In every proposal they must be “on the other side.” They love disputings. They waste so much energy over incidentals that they have little or no strength left for the essentials. When the real campaign begins they are already spent upon the field. And what applies to individuals applies also to the larger life of the Church. The energy of the sects is leaking away in petty disputings and idle controversy, while the real work of the Kingdom is neglected and anemic. We quarrel over a banner, or over the style and colour of our uniform, or over the priority of the various regiments on the field, and all the time the enemy is rampant, and consolidating his forces and usurping the place and functions of King Emmanuel. I know only one way to stop the unhallowed contention and thereby to stop the waste, and that is by a closer and more praiseful walk with God. If all the sects would more rapturously contemplate “the goodness and mercy of God,” the majority of these “disputings” would vanish “like cloud-spots in the dawn.” This, I think, we may say, that the most bitter disputants are just those souls who are not restful and sunny in themselves, but rather disturbed and clouded in the dull mood of repining. If we could only get the “murmurings” out of the individual, we should get the “disputings” out of the Church.

“That ye may be blameless and harmless.” This assuredly would be the character which would result from such a spirit and such a service. Our innermost character would be without alloy, no base element mixing with it; and it would be without blemish, having no obtrusive or secret infirmity. It is pathetic to notice how far we are away from this healthy and wholesome attainment. There is so much bad stuff mixed up in our personality — so much ill-temper, so much illicit compromise, so much secret delight in sin, — and this base stuff is very contagious, and sends its nefarious influence far beyond ourselves. “Evil communications corrupt good manners.” “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” It is our Lord’s gracious purpose that our moral and spiritual substance be inherently pure and good, having nothing putrid and corrupting about it, and glowing with a contagious health. “Children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.” Yes, that is to be our ministry in the world. Our wholeness is to expose the broken, crooked life of the world. The only way to reveal crookedness to itself is by the ministry of straightness; and perversity can never be shown in its true colours except in the light of the truly converted.

We may talk about the black as much as we please; talking about black will not unveil its blackness; that can only be accomplished by putting it side by side with the white. And Christians are to supply the white, they are to provide the clean, pure foil against which sin will appear “exceeding sinful,” and all that is awry may be seen against the background of a perfect integrity. “Among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.” But our ministry in the world is to be more than an exposure of the world’s defects; we have to proclaim “the word of life” in which the world may find the hope and possibility of its own perfection. We are not merely to flash the searchlight upon wayward men, we are so to shine before them that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven. Our work is not only to reveal, but to redeem. We must certainly show men their rags, but we must also direct their despondent eyes to “the robe of righteousness” and “the garment of salvation.” We are apostles not only of light, but also of life. And to this great ministry we are called by this clarion appeal of the Apostle Paul.

“That I may have whereof to glory in the day of Christ, that I did not run in vain neither labour in vain.” Their gracious ministry will be his radiant crown. When his pupils have attained unto a fruitful peace, then will the teacher himself enter into rest. He will find his reward in their salvation.

THE ALTAR OF SACRIFICE

‘If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy’ (Philippians 2:17, 18)

What a man is this apostle, in his masculine strength, in his exquisite courtesy, in his constant readiness to spend and be spent for

others. Many Christians are satisfied with expenditure in which there is no “shedding of blood.” They give away what they can easily spare. Their gifts are detached things, and the surrender of them necessitates no bleeding. They engage in sacrifice so long as it does not involve life; when the really vital is demanded they are not to be found. They are prominent at all “triumphal entries,” and they willingly spend a little money on gay decorations — on banners and palm-branches; but when “Huzzahs” and “Hosannas” change into ominous murmurs and threats, and Calvary comes into sight, they steal away into safe seclusion. But here is an apostle who joyfully anticipates this supreme and critical demand. He is almost impatient at his own dribblings of blood energy’ in the service of the Kingdom! He is eager, if need be, to pour it out. He has just mentioned his labours in the ministry of the Churches, but he feels as though these labours are scarcely worth the naming, and he turns his eager, ambitious eyes to vaster possibilities still, even to the laying down of life itself. “If I am offered” (literally, poured out as a drink offering) “upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy.”

Let us pause to realise a little more fully the strong and gracious figure which the Apostle employ’s. First of all he addresses these Philippian converts in their newly acquired and gloriously dignified role of priests unto God. He conceives them as standing and ministering at the altar; the victims of the sacrifice are not goats or lambs but their own faith and the fruits of it. It is a beautiful and inspiring figure. Only occasionally could they go to the temple altar, and take their offering with them. This altar was in their own hearts, in the temples of the Holy Ghost, and the fire could burn continually, and the sacrifice never need cease, and these disciples were independent of the official priesthood; each and every man could wear the sweet, clean linen, and stand by his own altar fire, and place upon the consecrating flame the fruits of his own thought and life. It is the privilege of the Christian priesthood to offer everything in the holy sacrifice. We can offer our thought, our purposes, our desires, our affections, our courtesies, our social intercourse, our daily labour, our daily bread, our moments of leisure, the season when merriment breaks through the dreary commonplace like bubbling springs through desert sands, our sorrows and our joys, — we can take them all and with clean hands place them upon the altar so that the offering shall be unending, and the smoke of sacrifice rises night and day.

If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

And all this is just what these Philippian Christians were doing. These priests and priestesses were busy at their altars, the jailer and his household, and Lydia and her friends of the prayer-meeting who met by the riverside. And now the Apostle, suffering imprisonment at Rome, felt that his own offering was one with the offering made at Philippi; so much so, that it seemed to him as but one altar, and that if he is called upon to die for the faith, it will be like the pouring out of a drink offering upon their own sacrifice. Each sacrifice will be enriched by the presence of the other, and they at Philippi, and he at Rome, will co-operate in sending heavenward “the odour of a sweet smell, acceptable unto God.” And for all this the aged warrior is ready. “I am now ready to be offered.” “If I am offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy.”

And now let us note how the Apostle counsels his fellow-believers to seek and find their joy in one another’s sacrifice. “I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.” This is the great secret in imparting a sense of buoyancy and triumph in the Christian life. No man ever sacrificed himself without entering into “the joy of the Lord.” But let us also remember that our own joy is more than doubled when we enter into the sacrificial joy of others, and regard our offerings as placed upon the same altar. Another man’s joy brings tonic to our own, as his joy is braced and invigorated by ours. I wonder, when our Saviour saw the poor widow casting “two mites into the treasury,” and saw that it meant the shedding of blood, whether He linked the deed with the already looming and stupendous transaction of Calvary? Surely it must have been so. Surely our Lord found joy in her sacrifice, as surely in the after-days the poor widow found eternal joy in His. The sacrificial spirit is one, and all the sons of sacrifice are priests at the same altar. We in this latter day are one with the “bleeding saints” of all time; we can rejoice with all the martyr band which in every age has spent its treasure in the cause of the Kingdom of God.

MY SON TIMOTHY

“I hope in the Lord” (Philippians 2:19-24)

Every flower in Paul’s life springs out of a common bed, even out of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He has no wish that is not rooted in Jesus, no hope that does not find its sustenance in Him. He is indissolubly one with the Saviour* and everything is vitalised by the communion. Many Christians only root their crises “in the Lord,” the great purposes and events which come now and again; but the apparently smaller matters, the wishes of the ordinary day, the plan of the moment, the commonplace journey, the humdrum coming and going, are given such precarious nutriment as they may be able to find apart from the risen Christ. It is altogether beautiful when a life not only has its great oaks and palm trees embedded “in the Lord,” but also its more fragile and tender things, its

wishes, its courtesies, its delicate impulses, and its trembling hopes.

And what is this hope that is so fed and sanctified “in the Lord”? “To send Timothy shortly unto you.” Here is a fine and heartening glimpse into the complete consecration of the Apostle’s life. Could anything be more ordinary than this sending of a message of inquiry, and yet the purpose is to be quickened by the breath of the Lord? Everything in Paul’s life is to be made “alive unto God.” All the events in his life, big or little, are to be like the coins of the realm, every one stamped with the face of the King. The mistake so many of us make is that we allow the smaller coins to go unsealed with the superscription of the King; the halfpennies and the pennies are not sanctified; the consecration service is only held for the pounds. In Paul’s life it seems as though the consecration service never ends.

“That I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.” This saintly apostle takes heart from other people’s progress. He feels the glow of the sunshine which rests upon others. He is buttressed about by their strength. The water is very sweet and refreshing which he draws from another man’s well. Surely this is one of the enriching secrets of the “communion of saints.” It is the purpose of our Lord that His people should be bound together by the ministry of their manifold gifts and graces, that we should visit one another’s lives as we visit one another’s gardens, and return home inspired by the scent of new perfumes, the vision of new flowers, and the combination of new glories. And perhaps our neighbour-disciple will give us a sprig or a root from his garden wherewith to enrich our own, and he will accept one from ours, and so we shall all be the wealthier for every man’s inheritance “in the Lord.”

“For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state. For they all seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.” > And this is the very opposite to the gracious and open disposition we have just considered. Here is the consecration of selfishness. Here is the sanctification of heedlessness, the building of high, thick walls of exclusiveness, over which we cannot look into our neighbour’s garden, and in which there is no door to permit of gracious visits and friendly intercourse. Here are people marching beneath the Lord’s banner, but not intent on the Lord’s affairs. They are engaged in a selfish quest, and are not crusading in the broad, general interests of the Kingdom of God. And yet they are professed members of the Christian Church! That is the pity and the tragedy of it, and they exist in every age. The pity of it is this, that they never seek the things of others; and the tragedy of it is this, that they never find their own. They seek realities and discover counterfeits; they seek joy, and find only a fickle happiness; they seek comfort, and find only mouldering “comforts”; they seek peace, and find only material ease. If a man makes up his mind to ignore his brother, he will never find himself. If we want really to find our own, we must seek them in “the things of Jesus Christ,” and those “things” are beyond our own garden wall, and concern the interests and welfare of our brother. No man can forget his brother, and at the same time know his Lord. “If man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?”

“But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child serveth his father, so he served with me in furtherance of the gospel. Beautiful it is when Christian men have stood the test of exacting experience, and are now men of “approved” character, most evidently stamped with the hall-mark of the Son of God. It is a gracious attainment when men readily open their doors to us, and receive us as the accredited representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it was with youthful Timothy. He was always running other people’s errands, lifting other people’s burdens, making sympathetic inquiries at other people’s doors. His prayers were just crammed with other people’s miseries and other people’s needs. In all his great, roomy, hospitable supplications there was hardly a corner for himself. He almost forgot himself in his remembrance of others. And so it came to pass that the Lord remembered him, and conveyed to him “hidden manna” and “hidden treasure,” and Timothy became strong and beautiful before the gaze of his fellow-men. He “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” but he “wist not that his face shone,” or that he appeared so chivalrous and comely in “the garments of salvation.” For in Timothy was fulfilled the great spiritual law that “he who loseth his life shall find it.” “Him, therefore, I hope to send forthwith,” and this young, trustworthy ambassador shall be a living bond of spiritual communion between the imprisoned Apostle and his spiritual kinsmen far away.

BROTHER AND FELLOW-WORKER

“Epaphroditus, my brother” (Philippians 2:25)

“My brother.” It is a word which takes us down into the heart, aye, a word expressive of kinship, of closest intimacy — of blood relationship. It literally signifies “born of the same parent,” but we have taken the word and lifted it away from all material connections, and we now use it to express affinities and relationships of a higher kind. Two men may be mentally born of the same intellectual parentage. Two poets may trace their sonship to the same head. They were born at the same fountain, and the marks of the common birth are unmistakable in both. But the word “brother” has a finer significance still. We now lift it quite above all suggestion of mere mental currency — of intellectual blood — to express the subtler currents that move in the remotest places of the soul, too

When Paul uses the term “brother” he is away in the sphere of purposes and motives, where hopes and fears are born, where prayers begin to ascend, and where the marvellous powers of grace are experienced and enjoyed. He is away in the new life that is born of Christ. “He that drinketh My blood hath eternal life he is away in that blood-relationship. Paul and Epaphroditus had both drunk of that parentage, and that marvellous current flowed in their spiritual veins. Each was born of God, and they were brothers in Christ.

And what times they had together! The spirit of each vibrated and responded to each other. In their sorrows deep called unto deep, and they discovered how brave and sweet was their comradeship in the Lord. They thrilled to each other’s joy, and handed round the cup of each other’s delight. They had interchanged revelations, and had passed whole nights in repeating into each other’s ears the story of the Lord’s dealing with them. “Epaphroditus, my brother.” When Paul had a wound, Epaphroditus knew just where to put the balm. If Paul were a little depressed because his services were imprisoned, and his spirit was a little feverish and heavy, Epaphroditus knew just what window to open, and what blind to pull up in order to let in the air and light of God. And if Epaphroditus was sick or in trouble, Paul was an expert hand in bringing to his spirit exuberance and grace. Each of them just flowed with the gracious sympathy of the Lord, and because they were one in Christ, their lives interpenetrated each other with the ever-embracing influences of redeeming grace.

“My fellow-worker Epaphroditus was a man who was not afraid of hack-work. If there was a bit of service, a bit of grey drudgery, which would be accompanied by no flying banners and no brass bands, Epaphroditus was the one to do it. He never asked the colour of the service; if anything, he preferred the grey. It is easy to be a show horse, and to prance round the ring to the accompaniment of music and popular applause. But to be a common hack, working the gin, or, worse still, just carrying fodder for the show-horse, is not an alluring service. But how much we are indebted to the willing drudge. Now Epaphroditus was perfectly willing to do the hackwork. He was “your messenger.” He was the errand boy of the Church. He was your “minister.” He was the servant of the party. I have been thinking that if the little company at Philippi kept a minute-book you would find many such entries as these : “It was moved by Clement, and seconded by Euodias, that our brother Epaphroditus be requested to make arrangements for the visitation of all the Churches in Macedonia.” This resolution, like all such resolutions, would be carried unanimously, and Epaphroditus quietly carried it out. Or here is another : “It was moved and seconded that our fellow-worker, Epaphroditus, be requested to collect subscriptions for our distressed brethren in Jerusalem.” And again he would quietly carry it out. Or here is another : “That our fellow-worker, Epaphroditus, be requested to journey to Rome, to convey our good will to our brother Paul, and to take him some token of our regard.” I say you would often find entries of this sort, as indeed you find them in the minute-book of every Church in our land. There are one or two or three to whom every Church turns and offers its hack-work and by whose service the more showy life of the Church is made possible. They rarely, if ever, appear on the platform. They carry no banners, there is nothing distinguished about their goings; they just take up a little bit of plain commonplace work and it is thoroughly done. And it has a beauty of its own because it is no hack-work to them at all. They just rejoice in it, and along what to others would be a monotonous road, they find the birds and the flowers of the Kingdom, and the sweet and blessed company of the Lord.

It is the way the Master went. Shall not the servant tread it still? But Epaphroditus was more than a worker — he was a fellow-worker. There is much significance in that prefatory word “fellow.” Epaphroditus could work with other people.

It is a beautiful grace. We sometimes say of a horse, “It is no good in a pair, it must be by itself.” We sometimes say there are men who are too angular to work with other men, and they must go alone. Epaphroditus was a grand fellow to work with, and Paul rejoiced in his companionship. He had most genial tendrils of sympathy, and he put them out and tenderly laid hold of others and laboured with them in most genial accord. Surely this is typical of the healthy member of the Church of Christ. It is a good thing to be a worker; it is a better thing to be a fellow-worker; it is best of all to be a fellow-worker in the Lord.

“And fellow-soldier.” What a transformation! Here is the hack become a warhorse. Aye, and that is natural. It is the men who are willing for hack-work who are never found wanting when there is battle in the air. It is just those elements in character that go to fashion a splendid drudge which contribute also to fashion a glorious warrior. It was because Cromwell’s peasants were such brave and splendid men in the obscure road of drudgery, that they responded to the first blast of the bugle and became invincible in arms. Epaphroditus was not far to seek when there was some abuse to fight against in the city of Philippi. He was a knight of the Lord’s table, and he went out redressing human wrongs.

There is one other trait in the portrait of Epaphroditus which is given by his friend the Apostle Paul. Let us mark this exquisite selfforgetfulness. “He longed after you all, and was sore troubled because ye had heard that he was sick.” He had no trouble concerning his own sickness, he was only troubled because other people were troubled about him. Their anxiety concerned him more than his own pain. Is not that a beautiful example of “a heart at leisure from itself”? Epaphroditus got right out of his own trouble to inspect and feel the needs of others; and, because others were careworn about him, he longed after them all that he might set their fears at rest. He never seemed to think about himself, “he hazarded his life” in service. He disregarded it, thought nothing of it, just thought of his mission and went about it in single and prayerful regard. Service of that kind is attended by tremendous power, for life that is sacrificed reappears in the very might of the Almighty God.

HONOURING THE KING'S SOLDIER

“Receive him therefore in the Lord with all joy” (Philippians 2:29, 30)

That is how we are to treat Epaphroditus when he comes our way. First of all, our reception is to be hallowed by the conscious presence of the Lord Himself. It is to be “in the Lord.” The Apostle Paul will not have us merely applaud the minister, as though his doings were a purely human achievement, with no secret correspondence in the Lord. We are far too ready to applaud the servant and forget the Master, to indulge in flattering words rather than engage in reverent praise. It is one of the perils of our time, and one which our religious press has greatly intensified.

Epaphroditus of our day is dragged before the gaze of the envious or admiring crowd; his articles of dress are described, his oddities of manner, his private habits, his personal sorrows, his recreations, — until, in the multitude of trivialities, the servant's Lord is crowded out. How different is all this from the reception we are now considering. Epaphroditus must be received “in the Lord.” The light of that August Presence is to fill the scene, and in that pure radiance all petty personal trivialities will be eclipsed.

When Christ's Presence is realised in the reception, it will be the Christliness of His servant which will shine in the light; we shall look from the One to the other, from the Sun to its reflection, and our souls will instinctively assume the attitude of homage, and our words of eulogy will be spoken with reverence on our knees.

A reception of this kind will most inevitably unseal the fountains of joy. If we only flatter a man, we may drink the perilous waters of self-satisfaction; if we receive him “in the Lord,” “with joy” shall we draw water “out of the wells of salvation.” When we receive “in the Lord,” we shall also be glad in the Lord.

“And hold such in honour.” We impoverish ourselves when we withhold honour from the honourable. For here is a great law of life; when we truly honour the honourable we become identified with it. When we honour genuine nobility we enlist ourselves in the same chivalrous order. No man can pay true homage to a hero without, in the very homage, acquiring something of the heroic spirit. And so our mode of reception constitutes our measure of receptiveness. We appropriate what we approve, and while I honour Epaphroditus I am growing into his likeness. “He that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward.” And so my homage is not something detached and external, something which has no vital correspondence with my own life; it establishes a kind of highroad along which the glory or shame of my brother passes inevitably into my own soul. When a man honours a good man he becomes enriched by the homage.

“Because for the work of Christ he came nigh unto death, hazarding his life to supply that which was lacking in your service toward me.” And this is why I should hold him in honour — because he himself honoured his Lord above all things. He went “nigh unto death,” staking his very life “for the work of Christ.” So many of us are anaemic in our spiritual ventures, there is little or no blood in them. We take up the work of Christ, but our service is not vitalised by the sacrifice of our life. And so our work is never really alive; it is sometimes galvanised into the appearance of life, but the activity is only artificial, and it never communicates life to others. The measure of sacrifice in our labour is just the measure of our dynamic. No blood, no life; no life, no power. When we hazard our life in the service our power is superlative, for we then engage the mighty, co-operative ministry of the Lord who shed His blood for all men.

Epaphroditus did not turn back when his own Calvary loomed before him. He strode out, and climbed the ominous hill with a song. All the great servants of God have put their all into the venture, and in the holy crusade have dared the world, the flesh, and the devil. They have never staggered at the cost; they have never flinched at the demand of blood; they have called out all their reserves, and their last ounce of energy has been gladly consecrated to the cause of their Master's Kingdom. Of men and women of this splendid type it has been truly said that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” Yes, every drop of sacrificial blood is a seed of infinite potency, and it will work for ever and for ever in the glorious Church of our Lord. No drop is ever lost — waste fully spilled upon the heedless ground. “He that loseth his life shall find it.”

Epaphroditus was never nearer to his Lord than when he came “nigh unto death” for the work of the Lord. We approach our Lord by the altar stairs of sacrifice. And so, when Epaphroditus began to suffer, he also began to “enter into the joy of his Lord.” “When the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also.” As soon as we become partakers of the sufferings, we most assuredly become partakers of the glory.

REJOICING IN THE LORD

“Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord” (Philippians 3:1)

And this counsel wells up from the heart of a man who is in captivity in Rome. The whole of this Epistle might be very fitly described as a song in the night; the music of its gladness rises out of circumstances which are not friendly to light-heartedness and buoyancy of spirits. But the hostility only seems to give vigour to his joyful praise, as a great tempest wakes louder and clearer strains in an yEolian harp. His joy is not rooted in circumstances, but “in the Lord.” It is the same hallowed soil in which we have found the roots of his hopes and his purposes, and even the smaller initiatives of his crowded days. Nothing is planted in an alien soil — everybody is rooted in God. And so here is joy growing vigorously side by side with hope and faith and love, and all drawing their ample nutriment from “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” And if they are rooted in the infinite, how can they be disturbed by changes in the finite? “for he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.” In this rich, fat, nutritious soil the implanted roots never die.

And so the Apostle counsels his readers to seek after joys which suck their strength from the infinite. For even in the Christian life we are always in danger of being enticed into superficialities, and of seeking our delights and satisfactions in thin and easily exhausted resources. And the peril is just this, that the superficiality yields a little nutriment, and we are deceived by the fresh and speedy growth. A certain joy springs up immediately. I once planted some grains of wheat in a saucer. The growth was very swift, and the green, tender blade seemed to exult in its strength. But almost as speedily the blade began to sicken and droop; all its resources were spent, “and because it had no deepness of earth it withered away.” And so it is with all joys that are rooted in temporal circumstances, in the shallow saucer of earthly relationships; their sustenance is pathetically limited, and for lack of food they fade and die. Christian joy is rooted “in the Lord,” and will endure while God endureth; and therefore does our Master say to all who are thus abiding in Him, “Your joy no man taketh from you.”

“To write the same things to you, to me, indeed, is not irksome, but for you it is safe” Paul is not afraid to repeat his lesson even though it be in the nature of a friendly warning. I cannot but think that “the same things” refer to the dissensions in the Philippian Church, the unlovely rents in what ought to have been a seamless robe. He had possibly written an earlier letter than this, or he had sent a message by his delegates, or he may be referring to some previous personal intercourse which he had had with the Philippians. But in whatever way it had been given, the Apostle now repeats the warning. He is a “faithful minister of Jesus Christ.” So long as the cleavage remained, the trumpet could not be silent. He did not shrink from saying unpleasant things, and from saying them again and again, if the life of professed disciples of his Lord was crooked and perverse. It is the peril of the Christian minister that he is tempted to be suave and smooth, to use words like butter rather than like swords, to ring a merry wedding peal rather than make the alarm bell resound through the town. “I like my minister,” I once heard a man say, “he never makes me feel uneasy.” The ministry of this negligent pastor was acting like a lullaby, and the souls of his hearers slumbered in a sleep which was never disturbed by startling messages. If we are faithful to our Lord it must be sometimes our office to make people uneasy, to reveal to them their sins, and especially those darling sins, which supply an opiate to the conscience, and make their victim unconscious of their presence. We must not cry “Peace! Peace!” when there is no peace. We must rather proclaim our warning again and again, because for them safety can only follow alarm.

But if we copy the great Apostle in the fidelity of his stewardship, let us also imitate his gracious, because grace-born, courtesy. There is an exquisitely delicate tact in this very epistle, which can only belong to one who has been a diligent pupil in the school of Christ. Can anything be more tender than the association of a glowing exhortation to rejoice, with the reminder of his oft-repeated warning? And more than that, would not the contagion of the Apostle’s own fervent joy fill his letters with a genial influence, removing all icy resentment in his readers, and preparing the way for his severe admonitions? A man who is rejoicing “in the Lord” can burn away all barriers in his ministry, and by means of a kindling courtesy can find entrance into hearts even when he desires to lodge a reproof. And so we must keep the Apostle’s association unbroken. The very fire of our rebukes must be identical with the flame that burns in our most sacred joy. We must inspire men even while we reprimand them. While we point out their deficiencies they must feel as though we were giving them wings.

LIVING IN THE STREETS

“Beware of the dogs” (Philippians 3:2, 3)

There is no more familiar sight in Eastern cities than the herds of dogs which prowl about “without a home and without an owner, feeding on the refuse and filth of the streets, quarrelling among themselves, and attacking the passer-by.” And it is in this vagrant, outside life that the Apostle finds his figure of speech. It was a favourite figure by which the Jew expressed his conception of the conditions of the Gentile world. All who were beyond the circle of his own race were outside the home, living in the streets, feeding on garbage and uncleanness, or on the crumbs and offal of life’s feast. But the Apostle lays hold of the figure, reverses the

application, and uses it to express the condition of the Jews.

And this is the form of his indictment: It is you who are living in the outside streets. It is you who are contented with the externals, and satisfied with the mere crumbs of religious nutriment. You give the emphasis to life in the flesh, and you ignore the inner sanctuary of the Spirit. You think much of the “mutilation” of the body, and you give little concern to the consecration of the soul. You abide in ordinances, you boast of fleshly pedigrees, you glory in “outward things.” And what is this but the life of dogs — life spent in the streets? And it is all the more pathetic because you are called to something infinitely better, even the settled life of the home, the bounty of a well filled table, and all the gracious intimacies of a spiritual feast.

And so the great Apostle bids his readers beware of this most seductive peril in religion, the peril of dwelling in the streets. Streets are not homes — they are only the helpful means by which we reach our homes. But we are continually tempted to remain in the streets instead of walking through them to our homes. Ritualism is a street, and to many people an exceedingly pleasant and inviting one, and when used as a means and not an end it is often a most gracious convenience for reaching “the secret place” of our Lord. But it is possible so to emphasise the ritual as to forget “the secret place” to which it is meant to lead, and to find so much delight in the mode of approach that we never arrive. We may think more of a posture than we do of a disposition, more of a form of prayer than of the spirit of prayer, more of a sacrament than of the Lord. And this is to be “dogs” picking up things in the streets, instead of “children” sitting with our Father at “the feast of fat things” which He has provided for them that love Him.

And so it behoves us to “beware.” There are always evil-workers about, men and women who will drag down the high spiritualities of religion and ensnare us in the small temporalities of external ordinance and worship. They will emphasise circumcision and fasting, and the wearing of phylacteries, and the washing of hands; but they have no mind for the humility which weeps and prays in secret, which rears a sanctified altar where the sound of human applause is never heard, and which shuts out all earthly clamour in order that it may listen to the voice of the Eternal God. And it is so easy to listen to these superficial callings, to forsake the “Holy of holies,” and to loiter in the outer halls and passages of religion, and even to find our satisfaction in the streets. And the Apostle therefore unfolds the true life of the child, the rich, intimate life of God’s family circle, as opposed to this precarious life of the dogs in the streets. To “worship God in the Spirit,” our feet are not to halt until we have reached the inner and most holy realm of the Spirit. Every street must lead up to this. Every bit of ritual must be a finger-post pointing to this. Every form and ceremony, every posture, every means of grace, every sacrament must bring us into “the secret place of the Almighty.” Even the Bible must not be our goal; it must be a street through which we pass to our Lord. “Ye search the Scriptures . . . and ye will not come to Me.” We must press through all these external ministries until, having left them all behind, we are temporarily independent of them, and we breathe and hold communion in the glorious fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

“And glory in Christ Jesus.” Here is a second characteristic of the inner life, the spiritual home-life, as contrasted with the life of the streets. Men who abide in the outsides of things have their eyes fastened upon the shrine, and not upon the treasure it contains. They think more of the material temple than of “the invisible Church,” more of an ecclesiastical privilege than of a spiritual grace, more of a fleshly pedigree than of a mystic kinship with the Lord. They put their “confidence in the flesh,” and they glory in the things of the flesh. But the child of the home of God experiences a certain detachment from these externals; the material obtrusiveness drops away as soon as he comes into the presence of the Lord. The flame of the little lamp is no longer wanted when it has led us into the radiant home of God. It can then be put out. We will give thanks for its kindly ministry but in the brightness of His presence we will glory in the Lord. Let us never allow the flesh to usurp the throne of the spirit. Let us never burn incense to our nets. “He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord.”

REVISING THE BALANCE-SHEET

“But what things were gain to me, these I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:7-9)

And what coveted treasures Paul had been able to count among the “gains” of his past life! He seemed to have belonged to almost every kind of aristocracy which excites the dreams and kindles the aspirations of men. I think there is abundant suggestion that he moved in the aristocracy of wealth. Most assuredly he was a member of the jealous aristocracy of culture. With equal certainty we can affirm that he held high place in that ecclesiastical aristocracy which guards its portals with such sleepless vigilance. And without doubt he gloried in the “blue blood” of a distinguished religious pedigree, which gave him kinship with the most exalted circles in his nation’s life. Here, surely, are “gains” to boast about, and to enumerate as precious assets on the credit side of life’s accounts. And yet here is the Apostle deliberately transferring them to the other side and counting them as “loss for Christ.”

The value of our judgments altogether depends upon the quality of our standards. If the standard is mean, the judgment is correspondingly worthless. A flock of sheep seen against a background of dirty road may appear pure and clean; seen against a background of newly fallen snow they appear defiled. Everything depends upon the standard, the ideal which provides the test. A

little hill may appear stupendous to one who has never seen a mountain; to the man who is familiar with the uplifted splendours of the Himalayas it appears but a molehill on the plain. Glass may be considered brilliantly beautiful until we have seen the fascinating radiance of a diamond.

When the Apostle Paul regarded his aristocratic possessions as great gains, he had never seen the Lord; but when "the glory of the Lord" blazed upon his wondering eyes these things faded away into shadow and even eclipse. And it was not only that the Apostle's former gains were cheapened in the effulgence of the Lord, and stood revealed as contemptible nothings in his hands; it was that he ceased to think of them at all, they vanished entirely from the mind where they had been treated as supreme and sacred deposits. Henceforth, everything was to be judged by "the glory," and nothing was to be allowed to compete with the holy covetousness for its full possession.

"Yea, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Ruthlessly the old balance-sheets are swept away. That passionate pursuit of the old gains is now diverted into a new course, and all the concentrated energy of his mighty will is devoted to acquiring the secret of the risen Christ. "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." Everything had gone which men thought worth having — home, reputation, means, material prospects, all had been sacrificed when he closed with the Nazarene. It is even so to-day when a Jew transfers his allegiance to the Lord Jesus. It was once my blessed privilege to be the human minister in leading a very clever young Jew into the light and liberty of Christ. As soon as constraining grace had done its work, and the decisive step was taken, my friend was summarily bereft of all tender human relationships, stripped bare to poverty, and in very literal truth he "suffered the loss of all things." But what cared my rejoicing friend or what cared the exultant Paul?

"I do count them as refuse. Yes, compared with the "feast of fat things" which is provided by the Lord, everything else is but as refuse, the scraps which are thrown to the dogs from their master's table. Who is going to trouble about these things when the gracious host is "satisfying the mouth with good things"? Who is going to fill his nights with weeping and wailing because he has lost a "precarious living" when he has found eternal life itself? Who will fret his heart away because he has ceased to be a vagrant when he, on the other hand, has found a home?

And why did the Apostle esteem these things as refuse? "That I may win Christ." That to Paul is now the only gain worth naming. His one ambition shall be to clear away the lumber, and offer a roomier and more glorious hospitality to his Lord. He will "pull down his barns and build greater"; he will seek a manifold enlargement of being — of thought, of imagination, of affection, of will; he will push back the confining walls in order that in the more comprehensive life he may be able to enjoy the richer and freer presence of his Lord. "That I may win Christ, and be found in Him!" For long enough he had been on the outsides and circumference of things: now he had discovered the true centre of all things, and his burning desire was to be found in that centre, drawing his very life from that fountain, his own veins filled with the blood-currents which flow from that redeeming heart.

And in what guise does he wish to be found? "Not having mine own righteousness which is of the law." No, he will leave that behind, as a poor artificial accomplishment of the past years, a manufactured garment, and not the natural and winsome attire which is akin to the glory of "the lilies of the field." His past righteousness was "put on": now he covets a righteousness which has "grown out," the inevitable creation of redeeming grace, the righteousness which is born "through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." He is abundantly willing to lose the thin and fading robe of reputation if only he can gain the splendid and incorruptible garment of a sanctified character. And that splendid garment is not the product of works, the fashion of human hands; it is the workmanship of God, the finished creation of His abounding grace.

IDENTIFIED WITH CHRIST

"That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10)

And this is knowledge of an advanced and matured kind. Paul is not to be satisfied with matriculation, he must take his degree with honours. He will not settle down among the rudiments content with the bare outlines of spiritual attainment, he must pass from stage to stage, through veil after veil, deeper and deeper into the marvellous arcana of the grace and love of God. That should be the characteristic ardour of the Christian. But the trouble is that so many of us get into the first standard and there we remain, because we have no passionate desire to pass into the second. We do not "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." And so we grow old in years, but we are wearing the mental and spiritual garments of childhood.

If I may write it reverently we must appear as pathetically grotesque to those "who look with other eyes than ours," as a full-grown man would look to us if he were wearing the habits of a little child. Our conceptions of the Lord are no bigger than they were when first we met Him. Our sympathies are no richer, no more comprehensive. Our prayers have not increased in grasp and range. We are "just where we were." We are pitiable specimens of "arrested growth." But here is Paul, with an eagerness for spiritual knowledge which bears him along from "grace to grace," "from strength to strength," and "from glory unto glory." Every new discovery

awakens new wonder, and every new wonder intensifies the ardour of his quest. Every day brings its own surprise, while every day there stretches before him the untraversed continents of “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

“And the power of His resurrection.” And this, too, he would know in Christ. Many people can recount the evidences for the resurrection who are strangers to its power. They know the facts of history, but the facts have no corroboration in personal experience. They have no doubts about the sunshine, but they have no intimacy with its fertilising warmth. They do not doubt “that Jesus rose again,” but they have not “set to their seal that it is true.” Now Paul was passionately keen to know not only the fact but the power of the fact. He recognised that in the resurrection of Jesus amazing forces were at work, and that if he could only come into the sweep of their tremendous current he would be uplifted in their strength, and all deadly imprisoning ceremonies would be left behind. If he could only become one with the Man who snapped the bars of death, and walked out of the tomb, then no grave should ever hold him, no matter whether the bondage were of moral or material corruption. His own dynamic of renewal must be found in the power of the resurrection of his Lord. And so all minor ministries were assigned their own subordinate place — the petty forces of wealth, of culture, of friendship — and he esteemed all things but loss that he might become united with the superlative power of God, “which worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.”

“And the fellowship of His sufferings.” That is a phase of the Apostle’s ambition which may well make us wonder. We can understand the intensity of his desire to experience the power of his Saviour’s resurrection; but is it not strange that he should be equally eager to become intimate with his Master’s pangs as well as with His triumph? Ah, but the share in the triumph is impossible without some share in the pang. No one can “enter into the joy of the Lord,” who has not also been with Him in His temptations. When the sons of Zebedee’s children asked, “that they might sit, one on His right hand, and the other on His left, in His kingdom,” the Lord made this apparently cold and ungracious reply : — “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of?” And yet the reply was full of light and grace. We must share the cup if we would share the throne. We must share the ploughing and the sowing if we would really share in the song of the harvest-home. We must “go out after that which is lost,” if we would deeply rejoice with Him when the lost one has been found. We must taste the bitterness if we would also taste the exquisite sweetness. And so the Apostle is ambitious to know “the fellowship of His sufferings.” He would go with Him down the dark lanes, and into the chill, lonely places of Gethsemane, and climb some little way up the slopes of Calvary, if perchance he might the better appreciate the light and warmth and glory of the resurrection morning.

“Becoming conformable unto His death.” Here is the deep, innermost secret of the mystery of personal identification with the Lord. We can so merge ourselves in Christ, so “know him,” “so become one with Him,” as to be incorporated into the virtues of His unspeakable sacrifice and death. We need not be daunted and distressed by our inability to trace the lines of the mystery, and because our eyes cannot peer far into the darkness. To become one with Christ, by the abiding attitude of faith, and by the unbroken mood of surrender to His will, is to become identified with all that He is, and therefore with all that He did, and therefore with all that He shall do in ages yet to come. Our union with Him shall include the wealth of its inheritance, the energy and the efficiency of His sacrifice, and we shall manifest the incorporation by reflecting in our own degree a gracious willingness to give our lives in seeking the redemption of His brethren. “Becoming conformable unto His death, if by any means I might attain also unto the resurrection of the dead.” One with Him in the likeness of His death, one with Him in the likeness of His resurrection.

THIS ONE THING

“Not as though I had already attained” (Philippians 3:12, 14)

There was a time when Paul delighted to regard himself as “blameless”; but those were the days of dimmer vision, when “the glory of the Lord” had not yet shone upon him. In a dim light a faded garment may appear presentable. The shabby furniture which passes muster in the gloomy days of winter is revealed as very dingy and worn when the brighter days of spring bring sunshine into the room. Paul had lived in the grey twilight of the Pharisaic ideal, and secret faults had lain concealed, or had acquired the hue of positive graces. But now that the Light of the World had come all things were shown in their true colours, and masquerading virtues stood revealed as presumptuous sins. “All things are made manifest by the light.”

And so now he spoke very humbly and quietly about himself. He had no large pretensions, no fatal self-conceit. “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect.” I have gathered a few flowers, but they are only a handful from an awaiting continent. Here and there in my life the fruit is forming, but nothing is yet matured. There is promise, praised be God; and there is splendid possibility, but the full performance tarries, and “the best is yet to be.”

“But I follow after” He is not paralysed by the distance which yawns between him and the ideal. He does not sit down and weep tears of bitter impotence. He pursues the glory with all the intensity of a hound which has found the trail. And let us remember that this is the speech of an old man. We are accustomed to think of age as the season when the strenuous life is relaxed, when enthusiasm

begins to fade, when the early ardors begin to cool; but here is a veteran whose “eye is not dim,” and “whose natural force is not abated,” but who preserves in his old age the magnificent forcefulness of his youth. He is as keen as ever, as uncompromising as ever, following the gleam. The Lord has laid His hand upon him, and designated him for splendid dignities, and he will devote every ounce of his strength to the accomplishment of his Master’s purpose. “I follow after, if perchance I may apprehend that for which also I have been apprehended by Jesus Christ my Lord”

“Brethren , I count not myself to have apprehended He will not reckon perfection as an asset before it comes; such premature reckoning is the parent of loss rather than of gain. He will not repeat the folly of his pharisaic judgment, and glory in a “blameless” life. He will not dwell in a false serenity; his imperfections glared before him, and he lived in the constant sense of his need. “But one thing I do.” Mark how the great Apostle gathers all his energies together in concentrated and undivided purpose. Even though the ideal be as yet remote, even though the shining summit tower beyond him in dazzling splendour, he will not permit his strength to dribble away in vagrant endeavours or in futile regrets. He will have but one aim and one task, and every limb and every power shall pay tribute to its sovereignty. His religious ambition shall be supreme, and in the fierceness of his desire he will draw every minor yearning to the central purpose, like tributaries converging upon the main stream of a glorious river. It is this concentration which enfolds the secret of the progressive lives of all the saints of God. They live for one thing, and for one thing only. So many of us make our religion one of many interests. We take it up for a time, and then we put it down again. We are religious by spasms, we are devotional by turns. We assume there is a time for everything, and we often make the heavenly visitor tarry in the hall, or even at the door, until we have disposed of more urgent business. Now, to the Apostle Paul the urgent business in all business was just that of religion itself. Life to Paul was one vast temple, and the market was just a part of the temple, and so was his trade, and so were his friendships, and the one spiritual atmosphere must possess and pervade them all. If he were tent-making, the eyes of his soul were on the heights; in everything his one holy purpose was to become clothed in the glory of his Lord.

“Forgetting those things which are behind.” And what will he forget? Surely, he will remember his sins, that by the remembrance he may abide in lowliness and penitence of spirit. And surely he will remember his mistakes, lest in forgetfulness he should unhappily repeat them. What, then, will he forget? I think he will try to forget his successes. Here lay the snare of the Pharisee. The Pharisee made some little moral conquest, and then he sat down by it, and fondly hugged it and doted upon it, until he became the prisoner of his own achievement, and further progress ceased. We all know that there is such a peril as resting upon one’s oars, and that such resting is the immediate precursor of retrogression. We begin to go backward as soon as we cease to go forward. There is no holding one’s own in the spiritual life, except by continually holding more. And therefore it is a primary requisite in all progressive spirituality that we turn our backs upon our successes, and forget those things which are behind. “He that loseth his life shall find it.”

“And reaching forth unto those things that are before.” So far from dwelling indolently upon past attainments and triumphs, he strains every nerve and muscle to cover new ground, and to conquer further heights. “I press toward the mark.” He keeps the goal ever in view, never allowing himself to be enticed by the side attractions which may abound by the way. His eyes are fascinated by the coveted glory, and the fascination gives eager speed to his willing feet. And what is the goal which he contemplates? It is “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The Apostle will not be satisfied with any ideal devised by his own imagination, or any moral compromise offered by man. How high does God call me in Christ Jesus? What does my Lord declare to be my possibility? To what glorious destiny does he lead me? That shall be my goal, and that shall be my prize, and I will listen to my Saviour’s voice as to an Alpine horn pealing forth from the uplifted splendours of the virgin snow.

THE RULE OF FAITH

“Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded” (Philippians 3:15, 16)

But this is not the perfection of holy attainment. It is the maturity of grown men who have “put away childish things.” It marks the passage from the letter to the spirit, from the husk to the kernel, from the cold rule to the living principle, from the rudiments of mere ordinances to the expanding liberty of faith. And so it is not the attainment of perfection, but the attainment of the spiritual mood or posture which will inevitably ensure perfection. The Apostle has found the way of perfectness, and in that way sanctification is sure. A little while ago I lost myself in the mazing windings of a great city. I asked for guidance, and was conducted by a willing friend to the required road. When my feet were on the highway my friend left me, saying, “Now you’re right.” Not that I had arrived, but that I was sure of arrival. And thus it was with Paul. He had found “the Way,” the perfect Way, and some day he should most certainly become like his Lord, for he should see Him as He is.

Now, many of us are still in the rudimentary stages of the religious life. We are living, like the Pharisees, in the outsides of things, in the dim back streets, and we have not yet found “the way of holiness” along which walk the “ransomed of the Lord with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.” We play with ritual, and we do not worship in the Spirit. We give tithes, but we do not give ourselves. We fast twice a week, but we are not shedding our blood in secret sacrifice. We recount our merits, we do not sing the

Saviour's grace. We make a show of our works, and we do not "walk by faith." And so we are satisfied, persuading ourselves that we have reached the moral summit, when all the time the white heights are hiding there in a self-created mist.

But we must seek the great road of the Spirit, and in that road of far vistas "walk humbly" with our God.

"Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." When we have found the Way, let us have the mind of the Apostle, and forget our past attainments in reaching out for further triumphs. Every day has its own appointed surprise. Every new set of circumstances is the custodian of heavenly wealth. Every new step in the way brings us to a new portion of the field where hidden treasure awaits us. Let us, therefore, be "thus minded," with every part of our being thrilling in a great expectancy, assured that every moment is just a providential minister, ordained to still further enrich us with "the grace and truth which were in Christ Jesus."

"And if in anything ye are otherwise minded, even this shall God reveal unto you." If a man lift his eyes unto the hills of the heavenly calling, and serving God in the Spirit, shall walk by faith, he shall not be suffered to lose his way, even though he may make an occasional slip in judgment. A man who is fundamentally right, and whose eager purpose it is to "press toward the mark," shall not be allowed to wander into the perilous morass, or out on to the trackless moor. If he makes a mistake God will graciously put it right : "even this shall God reveal unto you." I think this is an exquisitely gracious promise. When a man is "right with God," his very errors of tactics shall be governed by the Lord for His own most Holy ends. Our God does not treat us as infants who must just be commanded and controlled. He treats us as men and women possessed of certain endowments which, if disciplined, will make us strong and full of discernment. It is His gracious will to bring us into holiness and power, into glorious forcefulness of character; but this could never be accomplished if He carried us as though we were logs, devoid of all self-initiative and power of moral judgment. We are not to be marionettes but men. And so we have to "run" and "wrestle" and "follow after" and "press toward the mark." And if in this holy and strenuous crusade we stumble in judgment, God will not permit us to stray into disaster and contempt. He will tenderly bend our erring feet into the Way again, for "even this shall God reveal unto you."

"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule." Yes, we must remember this. It is by the rule of faith that our conquests become assured. Faith makes new conquests, and preserves the spoils of the old. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." We must not deliberately leave the highway and turn into the byways again. "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect in the flesh?" We must not pause in our progress to recover an effete implement, to re-adopt a condemned method, and hope to reach still higher standards by expedencies which are obsolete. The rule of faith must be all-predominant throughout the entire way. It is as necessary to Paul the aged saint, as to Timothy, who has just been converted to the service. The same great fundamental conditions nourish the matured oak and the fragile sapling; and faith is as necessary to the sturdy veteran who is climbing the higher peaks of the hills of God as to the youthful disciple who is just addressing himself to the lower slopes.

IMITATING THE SAINTS

"Brethren, be ye imitators together of me" (Philippians 3:17, 19)

But this word is conditioned by another word of the Apostle's which he wrote in his letter to the Corinthians. "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ." With that implied condition Paul urges his readers to vie with one another in copying his life. He seems to say, "pick out the Christly lineaments in my character and repeat them in your own." There is no perilous self-conceit in the counsel. It is just the Holy assurance of confident intimacy with the Lord. The Apostle knew perfectly well that no one can enjoy close companionship with the Lord without acquiring some of the beauty of the Lord. It might be that he "wist not that his face shone," and he might recognise no semblance to his Master, but others would assuredly see some signs of his kinship with the Lord.

We are never good at detecting our likeness to other people. We sometimes say that a son is "his father over again," but the son himself cannot trace the lines of resemblance. And so it is with the highest relationships, the kinships of the Spirit. If we are the friends of the Lord we shall most assuredly be "transformed into the same image," even though we are unconscious of the gracious change. And therefore does the Apostle Paul, who knows that for him "to live is Christ," boldly challenge his readers to study his spiritual lineaments, and to emulate one another in reproducing the Christliness in their own lives.

"And mark them which so walk even as ye have us for an ensample." There is nothing more spiritually invigorating than to keep our eyes steadily fixed on noble men and women. We appropriate what we contemplate. Our eyes are more than organs of discernment, they are channels of reception. Our visions become our possessions. That is a most sure law in the spiritual life. When we admire the good we unconsciously absorb it. It is so in art, it is so in literature, it is so in religion. The master passes into his pupil through the medium of a persistent contemplation. And therefore it is well to fix the eyes of one's spirit upon Paul and Timotheus and Epaphroditus, to "mark them" if perchance their nobility may communicate itself to us and so clothe us with the glory of the Lord. And therefore, again, I think it is well that every Christian disciple should always have at hand some great and shining biography, the

record of some strong and beautiful life lived in steady companionship with the King. Such mystical friendships keep us in tune, they keep us to concert pitch, and something of their own spiritual mastery steals into our own minds and hearts.

"For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ." The Apostle is writing these words in tears. They are the tears of an old man in prison for his Saviour's sake. Tribulation has not made him hard and austere; still less has it made him a cynic. When he thinks of the inconsistencies of professing Christians his indignation expresses itself in sacrificial tears. And so Paul was a "partaker of the sufferings of Christ"; he was walking over the same bit of road his Master had travelled when He wept over Jerusalem. Alas, it so frequently happens that Christians can frame indictments of their fellow-Christians, and can do it with delight. We can gossip about their frailties, their disloyalties, their defiled garments, and our speech affords to speaker and hearer a spicy entertainment. We gloat over the scandal; we do not weep over it. And so it comes to pass that our speech is inflammatory and not remedial; it distributes the contagion rather than helps to destroy it. It would be far better to leave our brother's sins alone and not even to name them, unless our warning is suffused by intercessory tears. And what is this which makes the Apostle weep? There are men wearing the Christian name who are "the enemies of the cross of Christ." They are consecrating self-indulgence, exercising a fenceless liberty in the sacred name of redeeming love and grace. They are presuming upon the goodness of God; they are flippantly reckoning upon the unlimited scope of forgiveness; they even proclaim that they magnify the grace of God by the extent and blackness of the sin which they present to Him for remission. This unfettered liberty becomes their deepest degradation, for they "glory in their shame."

Now it may be that we cannot find our own likeness in this description of "the enemies of the cross of Christ," and yet if we look closely we shall find that the resemblance is not altogether lacking. The style of the countenances may vary, but the spirit may remain the same. Do we not presume upon our knowledge of "the unsearchable riches of Christ"? Do we not swell our liberty into license? and should we not fear to do it had not the Lord revealed Himself in such superlative glories of grace? Is there not many a sin which we should never commit were it not that we confidently reckon upon the endless resources of our Saviour's love? That is to say, we are using the very Cross to make us feel secure in our sin. What the Cross was ordained to destroy we make the Cross confirm. If He had not died for us we might have been more pure; but He died, and in His death He revealed an infinite love; therefore let us eat and drink and sin, for He will not see us destroyed. All such are "enemies of the cross of Christ"; their "end is perdition"; they "glory in their shame"; they "mind earthly things." Yes, they are mundane and grovelling; they wear the Christian label, but they are devoid of the Christian spirit. Their life has nothing of an upward trend in its movements. It has no aspirations, no spiritual ideals, no heavenly places, no sky. It is life without wings, "of the earth earthy," and because it does not enter into the secret of our Saviour's death, it never experiences the power of His resurrection.

THE HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

"For our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20)

One can realise the thrill in the Apostle's words as the exultant boast leaped from his lips. The great Apostle never apologises for his Saviour. He never indulges in timid excuses for his religion. He is never ashamed of the gospel. It is one of his shining characteristics that he carries it all with holy pride. There must have been something of rare and consecrated dignity about his very walk.) I verily believe that we could not have seen him pass along the streets without detecting a distinguished air of large relationships in the manner of his going. Yes, his very "walk" must have been significant. They say that men whose calling makes them pass their days in the vast aisles and beneath the spacious domes of great cathedrals instinctively acquire a certain stateliness of mien which gives them kinship with the glorious pile. And men whose holy calling leads their feet along the splendid aisles of Christian liberty, and under the illimitable dome of redeeming grace, do most assuredly acquire a certain aristocratic bearing which reveals their sonship to the Eternal God. The Roman citizen had an air and a confident carriage which distinguished him from the Roman helot and from the common crowd. And I would that about every professed believer in the Lord Jesus Christ there were a sacred pride of lineage, a birth-mark of high connections, an incommunicable atmosphere which would infallibly suggest that his citizenship is in heaven. When the Apostle gloried he gloried "in the Lord."

And here his lips open in hallowed boasting of the kingdom into which he has been free-born. "Our citizenship is in heaven." That was the kingdom he recognised, and he rejoiced to believe that his own name was found among the free burgesses of the blessed state. He obeyed the decrees of that kingdom. In the midst of human clamour he listened for "the high calling" of God in Christ. He was not swayed by the noise of the multitude; he was constrained by "the still small voice" of the Lord. He took his commands from the great white throne. He was afraid of human imperatives, that are so apt to be warped and perverted. Many of our ships carry a second compass, fixed in a more exalted sphere than the first. For these ships sail into water where strange, magnetic currents prevail, which pervert the accuracy of the compass, and render its guidance perilously delusive. And so the mariner directs his course by the compass which is set above the disturbing currents, and he reaches his desired haven. Paul's citizenship was in

heaven. He sought his guidance in “the heavenly places,” and he refused to conform his conduct to the perverted fashion of the world. He set his mind on the things above.

And he enjoyed the franchises of the Kingdom. His citizenship not only imposed grave duties, it also conferred sublime privileges. To be a freeman in the New Jerusalem was to be free indeed. He was free from the terrors of the law; he was free from the dark bondage of unforgiven sin; he was free from the galling yoke of petty ordinance, and he was free from the paralyzing fear of death and judgment. To be one of the Lord’s freemen was to drop all ignoble servitude; it was to become a son in the Father’s house, and to enjoy “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

And he rejoiced in the protection of the kingdom. A British subject has Britain’s protection in every corner of the globe. Britain’s army and Britain’s navy are at the disposal of the poorest and obscurest Englishman if in any part of the world he be made the victim of oppression. The United Kingdom became loud with the sound of war because a handful of her humble fishermen had been maltreated on the North Sea. Yes, our country’s protective power attends our goings. And so it was with the Kingdom, in whose book of life the Apostle’s name was written. Its marvelous resources were pledged to his defence. “Shall not God avenge his own elect?” “Who is he that shall harm you?” The citizen of heaven is never abandoned to lonely and impotent desolation. Invisible allies surround us on every side. “The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire.” Therefore, “Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war should rise against me, even then will I be confident.”

“From whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ The Apostle had already great possessions, but he had greater expectations. Even now the heavenly country gave him something of its treasures; some day her gate will open and he will meet her King. The love-gifts are unspeakably gracious, but they will pale before the Lover Himself. Paul’s most ardent expectation was centred upon the actual meeting with the Lord; he watched and waited, and strained his sight for His appearing. Most certainly he could have sung with unfaltering tongue, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee.” To this devout apostle, heaven was Jesus, and Jesus was heaven.

“Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory.” Yes, before this glorious meeting can be effected, we must obtain suitable attire. Our present bodies constitute our travelling-dress; at the great “appearing” we shall change into our bridal robes. The fashion is to be altered. We need not worry about the wardrobe. Our Lord will see to it. He will take away all feeling of fearful strangeness by making us like Himself. We are to be “conformed to the body of His glory.” So shall we be at home with the Lord. “I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.”

“According to the working whereby He is able to subject all things unto Himself.” That is the Apostle’s hope, and the hope of all men. “He is able.” He can make the wilderness “blossom as the rose.” He can make the skin of the leper “come again as a little child.” He can make a conspicuous saint of the Magdalene. He can clothe me with the robe of righteousness. I shall attain.

And I hope by His good pleasure.
Safely to arrive at home.

THE UNWITHERING CHAPLET

“Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for” (Philippians 4:1)

The Apostle delights to lead his “children in the faith” to some lofty spiritual eminence which commands a vast outlook over their inheritance in Christ. He loves to be a guide to “heavenly places,” in order that he may then challenge the spirit to fresh and more ardent devotion. Nearly all his “therefores” and “wherefores” are spoken on the heights. When the soul is feasting in its spiritual Paradise, and is almost overwhelmed by the contemplated glory, the Apostle steals in quietly with one of his “wherefores,” reminding us what manner of life such privileged men and women ought to live. And here the Apostle has been leading his Philippian converts amid the massed treasures of the heavenly citizenship, and making their spirits burn in the Christian expectation of ultimate glory. And even while the glow is on their spirits, and while the holy wonder still arrests their eyes, he makes his gentle appeal, with a “wherefore” which seeks to convert the ardour of contemplation into the sacred fire of more intense resolve. But before we meditate upon his appeal, let us consider the consummately gracious manner in which it is made.

“My brethren beloved and longed for.” Many a just appeal is spoilt for lack of grace. The counsel was thoroughly good, only it was not protected by delicate layers of courtesy, and so it was resented rather than esteemed. Now courtesy is not an art, and still less is it an artifice. We cannot “put it on.” It is not a work, but a fruit. It is natural, not artificial. It is not made; it grows. Graciousness is the outer appearance of inward grace. To be really courteous we must dwell in the courts of the King, and sit with Him at His table. And this is just the explanation of the exquisite courtesy of Paul; he could not be anything else! Can a fig tree bring forth thistles? If we are ungracious the fault is not superficial, it must be sought for at the roots.

"My beloved." That is no idle, conventional word, a common and familiar mode of address. When Paul used the word, it was spirit and it was life. It was a vehicle of affectionate energy, and it carried a part of himself. The Apostle could afford to be prodigal of his love, because he had an unlimited income. "We love, because He first loved us." Love flowed into him from the heavenlies, and it flowed out again in a thousand different channels to enrich the earthlies. He was only instinctively distributing treasure which he had first of all received.

"And longed for." Love never goes alone. It is always attended by desire. It ever covets the excellent for its children. It yearns over them, and seeks for them the supreme blessedness. I wonder if we realise how much we can do for other people by the ministry of sheer desire. A holy longing for the good of others never moves with lame and laggard feet.

I firmly believe that every sacred desire helps to lift the one on whom it rests. When we set our desires upon them their strength is reinforced. Nothing spiritual is impotent. A hallowed wish is a thing with wings, and is a sure minister of godly elevation. Happy the people on whom rest the longings of the Apostle Paul!

"My joy." Once before have we seen how the Apostle finds his joy in other people's triumph. If our love goes out to others, and our desires rest upon them, then, most certainly, every sign of their welfare will add to our delight. And there were men and women in Philippi whom Paul had seen move out of darkness into light, and from the dry, desert waste into "a land of springs." He had heard their songs of jubilee. He had heard their cries of wonder as they made discovery after discovery in the new-found realms of grace. And their songs enriched his songs, and their wonder deepened his wonder, and their joy became his own.

"And crown." This is not the royal or priestly diadem. It is the chaplet worn by the holiday-maker, or by the triumphant athlete. It is significant of victory and merriment. We cannot be sure which particular usage is in the Apostle's mind, but we cannot be wrong even in assuming the contents of both. The spiritual progress of his Philippian converts made him merry as a holiday-maker, and made him feel like one who has won a signal triumph. The fading chaplets of the world he cares nothing about. But here is a wreath which he will wear through life and death, and which will remain immortally lovely in the eternal day. When these Philippians are manifested in glory, then will he be manifested in glory with them.

"So stand fast in the Lord." And that is the appeal to which all this love and grace and courtesy have been leading. If all this contemplated glory of heavenly citizenship may be yours, get your feet firmly planted on the heavenly road. Don't be seduced by transient fascinations. Don't follow a will-o'-the-wisp. "Stand fast in the Lord." Rivet your thoughts on Him. Rest your faith on Him. Suffer no distraction. Let no solitary power wander away in unlicensed vagrancy. Let all that is within you "Praise and bless His holy name."

THE MINISTRY OF CONCILIATION

"I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord" (Philippians 4:2, 3)

It is almost impossible to realise that the dissentient spirit was dividing the women-folk in the little Philippian Church. The Philippian Church was born in a prayer-meeting. A company of godly women "resorted to the riverside," and in the sweet morning air held communion with the Highest. And doubtless Euodia and Syntyche were found among them. Surely such conditions would be creative of an indissoluble fellowship in which misunderstanding and alienation could find no place. And yet it is clear that estrangement has entered, and the Apostle is using his own gracious influence to effect a reconciliation.

Now the Apostle has not burdened his letter with any details of the variance, and no good purpose will be served by the exercise of an uninformed imagination. We know perfectly well that when a poisonous suspicion arises in the heart it is because the fires of piety are burning low. When a foul air possesses the spirit it is because the windows are not open toward the Infinite. When human fellowship is broken it is because communion with God is not entire.

Believers can never be intimate with the Lord and yet be estranged from one another. And therefore, without being unwisely inquisitive about the details of this ancient quarrel, we can be perfectly sure that Euodia and Syntyche had relaxed their ties with the Lord. There is nothing for which the enemy of souls works and watches so intently as for the slackening of our spiritual attachments. For when the heavenly is neglected the earthly becomes unclean. It is amazing in what a tiny pinch of dirt a weed can find a footing. We do not need to become deeply carnal to harbour jealousy or suspicion; a pinch of dirt can give the requisite rootage. When we neglect the Lord that pinch is soon available, and all sorts of noxious growths contend with one another for a place in our lives.

Now we see how the Apostle puts his finger upon the secret of the alienation. He exhorts them to recover their unity "in the Lord." And that is the only place in which they can profitably seek it. Any other unifying ministry would be a merely temporary and patchwork expedient; the real solidarity can be found only "in the Lord." Marvellous are the solvents which work in the presence of

the Lord.

Hard thoughts pass away in grace Like cloud-spots in the dawn.

The only really effective way of removing ice is by raising the temperature. And when two people have been “cold” towards each other, when their conversation and fellowship are “like ice,” it is no good trying to chip away the encumbrance by the picks and axes of conventionality; the only resource is to raise the temperature, to bring the two lives into His presence whose grace is as a “consuming fire.”

It is a very gracious dispensation that their fellow-believers can help to bring Euodia and Syntyche into blessed union again. “I beseech thee, also, true yoke-fellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the gospel.” It matters little or nothing who the true yoke-fellow is, whether Timothy or Silas, or Epaphroditus or the Apostle’s wife; the fruitful matter is that somebody is besought to put their spiritual energies at the service of these sundered members of the Church. The quarrel must not be left alone. The variance must not be allowed to widen into an appalling gulf. Misunderstanding must not be permitted to rankle into hatred and contempt. When two members of the Church are at loggerheads it is the holy business of the Church to put them right. And this, not only for the sake of the two members themselves, but for the sake of the entire Church. Moral maladies are contagious. Personal variances are prone to breed social divisions. “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” The entire force of the Church must therefore be concentrated at the rent, for the purpose of repairing and healing it.

When the body is wounded, it immediately marshals a vast army and rallies it at the place of attack. And so would the Apostle Paul, when a rent is made in the Church, which is the body of our Lord. See what force he calls together. Not only does he beseech his “true yoke-fellow,” but “Clement also, and the rest of my fellow-workers,” all are exhorted to “help” in ending the estrangement between Euodia and Syntyche. It is a most suggestive counsel. Countless bitter divisions might have been averted if the counsel had been prayerfully and consistently followed. Small misunderstandings, which became aggravated into rabid sectarianisms, might have been healed at the beginning if only the Church had massed her conciliatory energies in the presence of the Lord. But we have allowed pin-pricks to fester until the blood has been defiled. The Apostle’s is the only effective ministry. If we are ambassadors of reconciliation our mission surely includes the conciliation of those who have been estranged. It is our blessed calling to “help these women” “to be of the same mind in the Lord.”

And the rank and file have a share in this glorious work. How delicately and graciously the Apostle mentions those who have no prominence in the administration of the visible Church : “The rest of my fellow-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” These, too, are called to the ministry of conciliation. Perhaps, after all, they are the best equipped for the service. The Lord has some magnificent peace-makers among the obscure. The homeliness of their presence, their average gifts, their fireside piety, their modesty and restraint, all contribute to make them refined experts in bringing discordant lives into union again. The brilliant leader might be hampered by his very prominence; the unknown and unhonoured “fellow-worker” may more easily find the secret door.

THE ART OF REJOICING

“Rejoice in the Lord alway” (Philippians 4:4)

And this counsel is given by an old man who is now the prisoner of Imperial Rome. It is not the enervating speech of the lotus land; it is a bracing exhortation ringing through the stifling air of difficulty and strife. Age is not frequently associated with such sunny exuberance of spirit. Its song is apt to “crack,” its lights burn dim, its disposition becomes despondent. Age is so prone to become reminiscent, and memory is a fertile breeding-ground of dark and tearful regrets. Age fondly dwells on “radiant morns” which have “passed away”; it turns its eyes away from the east whence new mornings break. And so the psalm changes into a threnody, and minor tunes pervade the evening hymn. But here is an old man in whose vespers the minor note finds no place. Hard circumstances have not made him hard. Apparent failure has not soured him into a cynic. He retains his fine, appreciative sense of life’s essential sweetness. He has not become moodily reminiscent of past glories and of vanished feasts. He feels the days before him. The pains of to-day are only the birthpangs of a better to-morrow. The immediate difficulty is only a prickly burr which contains most toothsome fruit. Circumstances may impose restraints, they cannot create an orphanage. Rome may separate the Apostle from his fellows, she is powerless to separate him from his Lord. Imprisonment still provides a room for two, and by no earthly conspiracy can he be bereft of his great Companion. The Lord is with him, and so the prison is ablaze with light. Old age glows with sunny optimism. The psalm of adoration rises night and day. And the captive sends forth to his fellow-believers the invigorating counsel, “Rejoice in the Lord alway.”

Now if this counsel proclaims an attainable ideal it is very clear that Christian joy is a mood independent of our immediate circumstances. If it were dependent on our surroundings, then, indeed, it would be as uncertain as an unprotected candle burning in a gusty night. One moment the candle burns clear and steady, the next moment the blaze leaps to the very edge of the wick, and

affords little or no light. But Christian joy has no relationship to the transient setting of the life, and therefore it is not the victim of the passing day. At one time my conditions arrange themselves like a sunny day in June; a little later they rearrange themselves like a gloomy day in November. One day I am at a wedding; the next day I stand by an open grave. One day, in my ministry, I win ten converts for the Lord; and then, for a long stretch of days, I never win one. Yes, the days are as changeable as the weather, and yet the Christian joy can be persistent. Where lies the secret of its gracious persistency?

Here is the secret. "Lo! I am with you all the days." In all the changing days, "He changeth not, neither is weary." He is no fair weather Companion, leaving me when the year grows dark and cold. He does not choose my days of prosperous festival, but is not to be found in my days of impoverishment and defeat. He does not show himself only when I wear a garland, and hide himself when I wear a crown of thorns. He is with me "all the days" — the prosperous days and the days of adversity; days when the funeral bell is tolling, and days when the wedding peal is ringing. "All the days." The day of life — the day of death — the day of judgment!

Here, I say, is the secret of perennial joy. The all-vital relationship is not between me and fickle circumstance, but between me and an unchanging Friend. If I draw my water from the wells of circumstance my resources are exposed to the peril of drought and convulsions. If I draw from the wells of salvation, the rich and bountiful supply shall be found "springing up into eternal life." "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be shaken in the heart of the seas. . . . The Lord of hosts is with us."

Now the Apostle Paul had become an expert in "the practice of the presence of God." He had so exercised his spiritual senses that his discernment had become delicately sensitive and acute. He had attained to a fine "feeling" for God. Until now the Lord's presence was as evident in the prison as in the temple, as evident when he stood before Festus and Agrippa as when he met with the little company of praying women by the riverside at Philippi. He "felt" his Lord everywhere, and therefore he could "rejoice in the Lord always." To realise the Lord is to "enter into the joy of the Lord," and "the joy of the Lord" becomes our strength.

In all his thinkings Paul's first thought was ever the Lord. All his purposes began in the Lord, and in the Lord they ended. He did not call in the Lord just when things had gone amiss, when he had lost himself in trespassing over a forbidden moor. To the Apostle the Lord was his Alpha. He consulted Him at the beginnings of things. He was also his Omega; in Him everything found its culmination. And there is no law in life more sure than this, that if the mind be thus centred and fixed upon the Lord, the Lord will be ever more and more clearly manifested, and the heart will be possessed by a quiet, sunny assurance which no circumstances can despoil, and which will remain bright and increasing "even unto the end of the world."

THE GRACE OF FORBEARANCE

"Let your forbearance be known unto all men" (Philippians 4:5)

The grace of forbearance is a sure accompaniment of joy in the Lord. The man whose spirit is clothed in sunny assurance, and who rides triumphantly upon his circumstances, will never be harsh or morose toward his fellows. When spiritual joy is absent, life is apt to become painfully rigorous; its very sadness is prone to make life hard and insensitive. When the heart is cold, our behaviour tends to be thoughtless and obstinate. The spiritual pessimist is wanting in delicacy, and his touch is violent. Spiritual joy endows the life with exquisiteness, and confers the power of apprehending the standpoint of our brother. The man who rejoices "in the Lord" is spiritually

telepathic, he can read the secret hearts of men. He is therefore distinguished by the grace of forbearance.

Now this grace of forbearance or gentleness is one greatly honoured in the Christian Scriptures. But its significance has been sometimes grievously misinterpreted. Its manifestations have frequently been suspicious, and lacking in a noble impressiveness. Real gentleness is never the issue of weakness; it is ever the offspring of strength. Weakness can be very clumsy, and can therefore blunder into painful outrage. A surgeon with a weak will and a trembling hand can never be gentle with his patient. He lacks the terrible resources which impart the exquisite touch. It is the surgeon with irresistible will, with iron nerves, who can hold his hand with such steady control as to touch a wound like softest thistle-down. A weak hand would torture the patient; a strong hand is the gentle minister of restoration. And so it is in the higher realms of character. Effeminate men do not make gentle knights. We need iron for the making of the finest blood. If the iron is absent from the character, the sentiment is watery, and pathetically inefficient. And so it is well to remember that this same Apostle, who counsels his disciples to be forbearing, also counsels them to "be strong." If we are not strong we may easily be brutal; if we are strong it is easy to be exquisite. It is people with loose opinions who are frequently the most intolerant; the man with the finest conviction is usually the man of widest and most hospitable communion.

Let me point out one or two characteristics of this most winsome grace. In the first place, forbearance, or gentleness, is reasonableness of dealing, a fine consideration for the claims of others, the spirit which does not urge its personal rights to the uttermost. It is frequently true that my highest right is not to claim my right. That is sometimes forgotten, and the noblest franchise of

the soul remains unexercised. Our Lord Jesus, as we have seen in an earlier part of this letter to the Philippians, had (a perfect right to be on "an equality with God"; but He "counted it not a prize" to be grasped at; He "emptied Himself," and laid the right aside. And so it is with the lives of His true disciples. They often taste their sweetest right in the surrender of their rights. They offer the chief seats to others, and find an excellent delight in the lower place. And this is one of the shining characteristics of the gentle life. It is strong enough to feel the rights of other people, and to prefer them to its own. It is always a sign of an impaired and perverted spirit that it magnifies its own rights, to the obscuring and subjection of another's. My own rights are shining with a clear and smokeless radiance when they illumine and magnify the rights of my brother.

And so, in the second place, it is very clear that forbearance includes the element of kindness. It is possible for me to recognise and respect the rights of my brother, and yet for my behaviour to be unattractive and unpleasant. A surrender may be brutal and sullen, and made to the accompaniment of growling, thundery murmur. I may yield the crown, and yet, by the very spirit of the yielding, I may convert it into a crown of thorns. And this is not the forbearance and gentleness of Jesus. In Christian forbearance there is no sultry gloom, no ominous grumbling. The atmosphere is pure and bright and sweet, and the birds are singing. The spirit is altogether kindly; how can it be otherwise with a spirit that is rejoicing "in the Lord"? How can there be this hallowed joy in the heart, and a gloomy frown in the face? True gentleness must be kindly and sunny; it is "light in the Lord."

And now the Apostle makes a very remarkable addition to his counsel. "The Lord is at hand." Is this not the introduction of a jangling discord? We have heard his exhortations to joy and gentleness, but will not this intrusion of coming judgment plunge the merry heart into cold eclipse? Will it not be as when some stealthy terror appears upon the field of sight, and all the birds are hushed in fearful silence? Oh no; that is one of the perversions of the years, but it was not the experience of the apostolic days. When the apostles thought of the Lord's coming, and "of the day of the Lord," their hearts rang out a merrier peal. It was not the gloom of eclipse, but the daybreak, when all shadows should flee away. And so they thought gladly and with longing of His coming, and their gentleness became still more refined. It gave courage to their hearts, and firmness to their steps, and out of that valorous strength there sprang all the softer graces of the consecrated life.

THE CURE FOR CARE

"In nothing be anxious" (Philippians 4:6)

How exacting is the ideal! Harassing care is to play no part in the believer's life. Worry is an alloy which always debases the fine metal of the Christian character. It mars and spoils it. And so the counsel is unconditional, and covers every period and sphere in human life. Anxiety is to be banished from everything. It is not to be permitted the smallest foothold in the Kingdom of our Lord. We are not to be anxious for money. We are not to be anxious for comforts. No, and we are not to be anxious for holiness. No, and we are not to be anxious for converts! Just here is the secret of so many failures. We banish anxiety from our homes, but we keep it in our churches. We do not worry about our daily bread, but we worry about the bread of life. We are not harassed about our business, but we are harassed about our Christian service. And so the destructive spirit is not completely and finally exiled. We allow it a single room, we do not refuse it the house.

Now we are clearly taught in the word of God, that anxiety is ever a ruinous minister even when it is employed in the highest service. I impair my power for winning converts whenever I become anxious about them. Anxiety never reinforces my battalions, it always weakens them. And for this reason: the channels of communion with the Highest are open to me through faith. Nay, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that faith itself is the channel through which the forces of the Highest pour into my life. The greater the faith, the deeper the channel; the deeper the channel, the vaster the flood. "According to your faith shall it be done unto you." Now, anxiety means the shrinkage of faith. The shrinkage of faith implies the narrowing of the heavenly channels. The narrowing of the channels inevitably results in the impoverishment of the flood.

Anxiety is an obstacle to the heavenly, and therefore it can never pay. And this, I say, is true of the very highest types of service. A minister who is anxious and worried about his ministry is choking up the very channels of his power, and he is therefore multiplying the chances of ultimate defeat. I am perfectly sure that this great law is frequently and even commonly forgotten, with the consequence that the forces of the kingdom are most pitiably reduced. I am persuaded that if the spirit of harassing anxiety could be cast out of the Christian Church we should be amazed at the voluminous energies which would course through her services. "The river of God is full of water." Why, then, does it only trickle through our labours? It is because the channels are choked by great boulders of anxiety, and by ten thousand petty cares. Only remove the impediments, and the glorious, invigorating waters would fertilise all our work.

But how is it to be done? The Apostle gives us the answer, and in that answer we find the antidote to care. And here is the first secret — "by prayer." The word which is here translated "prayer" refers not to the petitions, but to the mood of the petitioner. It

describes a frame of mind. The soul can be in a prayerful attitude, even if it refrains from making requests. All real prayer begins, not in words, but in moods. The great mystics have ever been experts in the knowledge of this secret. They have disciplined their souls to a reverent and receptive pose, until, at all times, their souls have been frankly open to the Divine. They have bowed in silence before the Lord, rejecting, in the first place, the clumsy expedient of words, and they have quietly drawn in breath in the fear of the Lord. It is here that we find the explanation of Paul's counsel to "pray without ceasing." If essential prayer be a matter of words, the counsel is impossible; but if essential prayer be a spiritual posture, it is possible to obey the counsel throughout all the changing hours and moments of the years. Happily, we can school ourselves to this exposure. The Lord has made it graciously possible for us to acquire a prayerful spirit, and it is in this fundamental, speechless prayerfulness that the Apostle finds the first defence against carking care.

But the spirit of prayer will not displace the ministry of definite speech. The inbroken mood will express itself in humble request. "By supplication." The intimacy of silence breaks into the intimacy of speech. Instead of worrying about things, quietly talk them over in the secret place. "Tell it to the Lord in prayer." And let us see to it that no well-dressed unbelief be allowed to limit the circle of our holy intercourse. "In everything ... by supplication." Such is the amazing range of our privilege in the Lord. In whatever sphere of life the problem presents itself, let us not address ourselves to its solution in anxious and lonely application. Let us quietly bring it into the holy place, and set it in the light of God's countenance. Yes, let the sacred light fall on it. Let us patiently await the revelation of the Lord.

"With thanksgiving Paul would never omit that element from his receipt when giving his cure for care. Half our worries would immediately melt away if we began to sing a psalm of praise. Some anxieties can resist everything except thanksgiving. When that begins, they melt away like icebergs in tropical seas. The life that is ungrateful is very cold and icebergs abound in its atmosphere. Let us raise the temperature and we shall be amazed at the results. A really thankful heart is so crowded with the sense of God's mercies that it can offer no hospitality to worry and care.

THE SENTINEL OF GOD'S PEACE

"The peace of God" (Philippians 4:7)

This is to be the rare fruit resulting from the culture described in our previous meditation. This is to be the gift of blessedness enjoyed by those who walk the paths of piety. If we live in the mood of prayer, if it be our constant frame of mind, if, instead of worrying about our needs, we habitually present them to the Lord in trustful supplication, and if in all our communion there sounds the gladsome note of thankful praise, we shall most assuredly be kept and sustained in "the peace of God."

Now peace is a word which is most grievously misunderstood. The very analogies and symbols which are used to give expression to its meaning show how profound is the perversion. We go into some chamber of the dead, where the hands of a loved one are folded in the last sleep, and we involuntarily whisper, "How peaceful!" Or we withdraw from the rush and noise of a great city, and find some secluded nook in the mountain, and there, by some lonely tarn whose still surface reflects the stately passages of the clouds or the swift transit of the homing bird, we are again constrained to say, "How peaceful!" But these are not fitting emblems to express the essential significance of peace. Peace is not the stillness of death; nor is it found in the silent stagnancy of a mountain tarn. Peace is life, it is motion, it is movement without friction. We may find its fitting symbol in some great enginehouse when the monster is at work and every part co-operates with every other part in smooth and perfect communion. Peace is not found when every instrument in the orchestra is silent, but when every instrument is making its own contribution, and the result is rich and perfect harmony. Peace is found in the absence of discord; peace is found when every bit of grit is removed from the wheels, when one force works with another force in sweet and unbroken fellowship.

It is, therefore, very suggestive that the root of the word, which in the New Testament is translated "peace," has the significance of "to join." A joining has taken place, and what is it but an adjustment between the soul and God? Man and his Lord are fitted together and become one, and this communion is the innermost secret of peace. There is no jar in the relationship. There is no reluctance in the intercourse. Will works in will with gracious and delightful freedom. That is peace — God in man, and man in God, the soul living and moving and having its being in the Lord.

This is "the peace of God which passeth all tiding standing." There is some divergence in the interpretation of these words, and yet perhaps all the combined interpretations are needed for a full exposition of their wealth. "Passeth all understanding." It is a peace which transcends all power of conception. It is unthinkable. It can no more be realised by the uninitiated than a perfume could be realised by one who is destitute of the sense of smell. The only channel of realisation is the channel of actual experience. To those who have not known the peace of God it cannot be even the subject of a dream. It is infinitely to be preferred to mere knowledge. Knowledge is good, wisdom is better, but peace is best. Peace gives a higher and a deeper satisfaction than all the devices and

acquisitions of the intellect. Trustful fellowship with the Lord is infinitely more fruitful than anxious counsels, than restless timidities, than the constant worryings of the sleepless mind. The “peace of God” is easily first, surpassing all the gathered treasures of mental acquisition, and it passeth all understanding.

And this peace of God shall “guard your hearts and your thoughts.” It is the figure of a siege. The life is surrounded by subtle foes, seeking to gain an entrance into the treasured pile. Temptations, fears, alarms — all are at the gates, cunningly waiting for admission. But within, peace stands as sleepless sentinel and guard, and life is secure. It is a very gracious picture. Our very peace is our defence. When there is peace within, when there is perfect harmony between the soul and the Lord, there is no discordant element, there is no internecine strife, and the little kingdom of man presents to the foe an unbroken and invulnerable front. Oneness with God is a unity invincible.

And mark where the vigilant guardianship is to be concentrated. “Your hearts and your thoughts.” The heart is the seat of thought, in which all our thoughts and purposes are born. Hearts and thoughts represent both the soil and the flowers which spring from the soil. They are both to be at their best when “the peace of God” dwells in the life. They are to be guarded from every foe, defended from every noxious and poisonous pest. When we are at peace, the heart-soil will be kept sweet, and the thought-flowers will be kept beautiful. When these innermost things are guarded, no plague comes nigh our dwelling.

And here is the secret of the sure defence. They are to be guarded “in Christ Jesus.” It is the Apostle’s familiar phrase. Hearts and thoughts are to be defended by their intimate communion with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an alliance of the finite and the infinite, and the alliance is constituted of the trustful and lowly reliance of man. To rely quietly on the Lord is to obtain an ally against whom the subtle and mighty hordes of wickedness cast themselves in vain. When we have “the peace of God” we are proof against “the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8)

Here is a man who, after a life full of menace and turbulence, every road heavy and bristling with hostilities, has kept his spirit perfectly wholesome and unembittered. His eyes are still expert watchers for the sweet and beautiful. This passage rests upon the background of the Apostle’s life like a brilliant jewel on dark plush. He is now an old man, with body bowed and broken, and he is waiting his trial at the judgment seat of hard and unsympathetic Rome. And the counsel which I have quoted is a counsel born of his old age. “Whatsoever things are lovely, think on these things.” I do not think it is an invariable tendency for people when they are growing old to concentrate more and more on the lovely, to find an expanding delight in optimistic tokens, and to feel the air sweeter and softer as the day declines. Old age too frequently shrivels in mind as well as in body, in hopefulness as well as in endeavour. But here is the Apostle, a man who up to the days of manhood had been a jealous Pharisee and had acquired habits of severe and rigid exclusiveness, and lo, by the grace of God, he has broken his prison house, and now he is growing old cheerfully, uninjured by the treachery and antagonisms of the way, roaming in the wonderful meadows of life’s delights, and rejoicing in “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

“Think on these things.” “These things” constitute the prescribed liberty of Christian manhood. They are a kind of inventory of the mental furnishings of the Christian life. And I think everybody will readily grant that the furnishings are not cheap and stingy, not bare and monotonous, but liberal and varied, graceful and refined.

Now let me review these glorious possibilities, this authorised dominion in Christian freedom of thought.

“Whatsoever things are true” True, not simply veracious. The word “true” is not used by the Apostle as we use it in a court of law, when we enjoin a witness to “speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” The things described in a police court as true are usually ugly and repulsive; truth is always beautiful. Truth in a police court is correspondence with fact. Truth as used in the New Testament is correspondence with God. An unclean story may be accurate; an unclean story can never be true. A story is true when in very substance it shares the likeness of Him who is the truth. Veracity accurately describes a happening, truth describes a particular happening. We are therefore enjoined not to think about merely accurate things, but about accurate things which unveil the face of God.

“Whatsoever things are honourable.” Things that are worthy of honour, worthy of reverence, the august and the venerable. The Authorised Version uses the old English word “honest,” which is suggestive of gravity, seemliness, dignity. There is a certain fine stateliness in the word, recalling the impressive grandeur of a cathedral pile. Whatsoever things make the character of men and

women to resemble the imposing proportions of a cathedral “think on these things.”

“Whatsoever things are just.” And yet our word “just” does not convey the Apostle’s mind and meaning. Justice can be very cold and steely, like the justice of a Shylock. It may mean only superficial exactitude as between man and man. But to be really just is to be right with God. No man is really just until he is adjusted to his Maker. Whatsoever things satisfy the standards of the Almighty, “think on these things.”

“Whatsoever things are pure.” But to be pure is to be more than just. It is to be stainless, blameless, and unblemished.

“Whatsoever things are lovely.” We are to bring the amiable and the lovable within the circle of our regard. John Calvin gives the meaning as “morally agreeable and pleasant.” I am glad that juicy word came from the lips of that austere prophet. There are many people who think that religion is synonymous with the disagreeable, and that only when things are unpalatable may we regard ourselves as safe. Dr. Matheson tells of a young woman who came to him in great distress over her failure to fulfil the religious duties of life. He was aware that at this very time she was living a life of sacrificial devotion to a blind father. “I asked if this service of hers was not a religious duty. She answered, ‘ Oh no, it cannot be, because that brings me such joy, and it is the delight of my heart to serve my father.’” It is a most common and perilous mistake. There are tens of thousands of duties and liberties which are juicy and delicious, and they are the portion of those who sit down at the Lord’s feast.

“Whatsoever things are of good report.” Not merely things that are well reported of, but things which themselves have a fine voice, things that are fair speaking, and therefore gracious, winsome, winning, and attractive. And then, as though he were afraid that the vast enclosure was not yet wide enough, and that some fair and beautiful thing might still be outside its comprehensive pale, the Apostle adds still more inclusive terms, and says, “If there be any virtue,” whatever is merely excellent; “and if there be any praise,” whatever is in any degree commendable, — take account of them, bring them within the circle of your commendation and delight, “think on these things.” Fasten your eyes upon the lovely wheresoever the lovely may be found. Such is the vast and authorised circle of our mental hospitality. Let us therefore go about on journeys of exploration. Let us seek for these lovely things in humanity, in nature, and in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everywhere our eyes will be surprised by gracious discoveries, and in the brightness of our possessions we shall be “children of light.”

THE THINGS WHICH LEAD TO PEACE

“The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do; and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9)

In our last meditation the Apostle has been unveiling to us the spacious sphere of Christian contemplation. Now he passes from thinking to doing. The transition is perhaps unnecessary, because the character of our doings is inevitably determined by the character of our thoughts. A revolution in a man’s mind will always result in a revolution of the life. If we alter the patterns in the loom, the entire patterns of the finished product will be changed. It is absolutely impossible to have a beautiful mind and a repulsive life. “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Whatever may be the errors and the idle fancies of Christian Science, in this particular matter they stand upon the truth of the everlasting God. Get the thought put right and everything will be in tune. And so I say it was perhaps unnecessary for the Apostle to add to his counsel about thinking a further counsel about doing.

But perhaps Paul’s further counsel is only intended to be a particular emphasis of the advice just given. He turns their thoughts to meditations upon his own life and teaching. “The things which ye both learned and received and heard and saw in me, these things do.” Happy the teacher who is not afraid of the hearer turning from the message to the messenger. I looked at a florist’s shop the other day, and I saw a great many packets of seeds. In the middle of the window there was an exquisitely beautiful plant in flower, and attached to it were these words, “Grown from our seed.” I say thrice blessed is the minister of God who, when he has been commending the seed of the word, can point to his own evident experiences as confirmation of its power and grace. And thrice miserable are those servants of God whose speech is utterly belied by their life. Now the Apostle Paul is bold enough to ask his readers to examine the word and works of grace in his own life. There is no unworthy conceit in the challenge. He makes no profession to be perfect as our earlier meditations disclose. But he does claim that the Lord has worked miracles in his own life, and that the signs of the miracles are open to the common eye. Why should he not make his boast in the Lord? “I know whom I have believed.” “I am persuaded that He is able to keep.” “My life bears witness to my words; Examine it.”

First of all, the Apostle is assured of the truth of his own message. He is in no manner of doubt concerning “the things ye have learned and received.” And we know where these things made their centre. The Apostle’s teaching gathered itself round about the cross. The Apostle further taught that no one could live by the cross without being inspired by the secret of sacrifice, and impelled to self-crucifixion. No one who dwelt in the shadow of Calvary would be unwilling to shed his own blood. Calvary must be in some degree repeated in the life of every disciple. We must take up our cross and follow Him. I recently walked over a trackless Alp,

guided only by red marks upon the rocks. I reached my destination by esteeming those bloody sides as the marks of the right road. And so it is in the life of fellowship with the Lord. When we are self-crucified we are on the road that will bring us at last unto the perfect glory. "These things do."

In the second place, the Apostle was perfectly sure of the trend of his own life. "The things which ye . . . heard and saw in me." Again I say, there is no conceit in a man's affirming that he seeks the things that are above. There is no rude pride in a man's declaration that he is "marching to Zion." He may slip and even fall, but he will fall with his face to the light. Paul did not speak in lame hesitations and in trembling doubts. He did not whisper; "I hope I am following the Saviour." He spoke in tones of perfect assurance, and his confidence acted like a splendid contagion. It would never do for an Alpine guide to pause and hesitate and speak in stammers concerning his knowledge of the road. He must step out quietly and confidently, in order that the others may follow with assurance in his steps. Paul was just an Alpine guide into the hill country of the Eternal God. And he was not afraid to turn to his children, begotten of the faith, and call them to mark his footprints and follow on. "The things which . . . ye saw in me, these things do."

And here is the reward of such meditation and obedience. "The God of peace shall be with you." 9 And that is everything. If the King is present at the table, a crust is a feast. If the Lord is on the battlefield, then amid all the surrounding turbulence there is a centre of peace. When the God of peace is in the life there is a chamber in which the sound of warfare never comes. A motorist said to me the other day: "The most tempestuous storm never gets into my engine." And so it is when the Lord is with us. The real dynamics of the life are unimpaired. And what matters it if the world bruises my skin or denies me transient comforts, if my heart is sound, and if all that is within me is kept in the smooth activity of "perfect peace"? The red road is a way of constant struggle, but it is also the path of unbroken peace.

THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

"I rejoice in the Lord greatly, that now at length ye have revived your thought for me; wherein ye did indeed take thought, but ye lacked opportunity."

I think if David Livingstone could have met the Apostle Paul he would have described him as he once described the Master, as "a perfect gentleman." There is always a most delicate courtesy in Paul's intercourse with his fellowmen. He never lays aside his masculine robustness; but there is always a touch as of moss upon the rock. He never becomes effeminate in order to be gentle; his tenderness is always the garment of strength. And in the passage I have just quoted, how gracious is his reference to the care which the Philippians have shown toward him.

How exquisitely does he recall their ministry in his necessity. He lifts up their deed until the light of the Lord rests upon it, and makes it shine in His reflected glory. The Philippians were greatly honoured in their services. To minister to a minister is to acquire a share in his reward. Any man who helped the Apostle Paul will know how to sing the Apostle's song. And this is the province of little people who have not been greatly dowered with imposing gifts. If I cannot be a Paul I can be a Paul's helper. "The Lord be gracious unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain." I suppose that Onesiphorus would never realise what he was doing, and little did he think that he was bringing refreshing water to the thirsty soul of the greatest Apostle the world would ever know. For even so great a man as the Apostle Paul had need of cups of cold water. I sometimes think that great men suffer the greatest impoverishment in the realm of human kindness. In the first place, we are afraid of approaching them lest our offers should seem presumptuous and impertinent. Or we think that such little ministries as ours can never be needed, and the kindly service is withheld. A friend of Ian Maclaren has recently told us of the delicate delight it gave him when anybody did him a kindness. An individual act of personal grace made his heart sing for many a day.

The Philippians had thus ministered to the Apostle's needs. But even while graciously acknowledging their kindness he makes haste to boast his contentment in the midst of all his changing circumstances. He proclaims a certain proud independence of his surroundings whether they be unfavourable or fair. His circumstances shall never be his masters, they shall pay homage to him as servants. If in ways of life he passes through the sunny moods of June, all well and good. If he passes into the sullen, chilling moods of November, well and good. "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." Sometimes life is "abased" and all the waters are low, and no enterprise seems to float, nothing rides forth in the strength of triumph. And sometimes life abounds, and the waters are at the flood, and the stranded purposes are afloat again, and everything rides prosperously. Sometimes life is filled and sometimes it is hungry. But in all these sharply antagonistic circumstances the Apostle proclaims his restfulness in the Eternal.

And he declares that the explanation is to be found in a certain secret which he has learned. He has made us familiar with that secret. It is a certain fellowship with the King, an intimacy which makes the Apostle laugh at impossibilities and which turns the most

frowning providence into a smiling face. No wrinkle of dissatisfaction shall ever deface the Apostle's countenance so long as the King is willing to be a guest at his table. Paul looked out with contented spirit upon the darker seasons of his life, and watched with most childlike curiosity to see how the Lord would use them. He did not resent a day because it approached with gloomy front; he eagerly waited to see its unveiling. I opened a black-edged envelope the other day, and found inside a cheque for a much needed service. It came suggestive of mourning; its contents were ministers of joy. And Paul looked well at the darker season for he knew it would contain something of "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

It is a great lesson and one which many of us are very slow to learn. We perpetuate the mistakes of the old Jews, and we regard the gloomy experiences as alien to our good, and even as expressing the reproach and disfavour of the Lord. And therefore, how can we be peacefully contented when the heavens lower and the darkness steals up to our gate? We are contented in "the merry May-time;" but how about the fall of the leaf? When the chill comes, does it incite the murmur? Is our piety dependent on the seasons? Is it a fair-weather creation? We have seen that Paul's contentment was not the prey of the seasons, flourishing or fading just as the air was soft or keen. His contentment remained unchanged, and the secret of it all was this, he had learned that there was a gracious purpose even in the dark cloud, that gloomy experiences were not chaotic, striking human life like destructive meteors which whirl outside the range and path of law. Everything had a beneficent heart, and its approach was directed by the loving purpose of God. That is the way to encounter the visitor who comes to us in sable robes. Behind the dark garments there is the King's presence. The plumage is black, but "it is the Lord who cometh, with healing in His wings."

THE MIGHTY DYNAMIC

"I can do all things in Him that strengthened me" (Philippians 4:13)

Yes, but who is the man behind the speech? The quality in the man's testimony is conditioned by the quality of the life which presents it. If a man has been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, if life has been a lazy afternoon in the lotus land of ease, the testimony of his pretended victories is worthless. What sort of life is there behind this witness? What dragons has he encountered? What sort of a devil has he met? And how many times has he been compelled to fight his way through armed hosts? Has life been a picnic or a crusade? The Apostle Paul does not shrink before questionings like these. He has a great history behind him. He has run the gauntlet of the fiercest fires. He has encountered tremendous obstacles, and he has beaten them into fine dust. He it is who, at the end of his tempestuous days, bequeaths this jubilant testimony, "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me."

What has he done? He has discarded old prejudices, which had grown upon him like a skin. I have very deliberately chosen this figure of speech. A prejudice, which at first is like a loose fitting garment, at last binds life like a vital skin. This, perhaps, is particularly true of religious prejudices, and more especially when they take an ecclesiastical form. Paul had been a Pharisee, a member of the strictest sect of the Pharisees, narrow and exclusive, and possessed by a spirit of keen and bitter jealousy. And in the strength of the Lord Christ he had taken those prejudices, stripped them from him, and had become clothed in the fine sympathies which are characteristic of the Christian redemption.

What else had he done? He had encountered the violence and enmity of those who were still in the bonds of prejudice. There is no antagonism like the antagonism of those you desert. When a politician crosses the floor of the House he is followed by intense and bitter resentment. When a member of a religious society changes his ecclesiastical home nothing can exceed the severe enmity of his old coreligionists. And so it was with the Apostle Paul. He had changed his sphere and he became encircled with the malicious persecution of his old friends. They had no reply to his message, they would therefore kill the messenger. And yet he was not dismayed nor vanquished. Again and again he returns to the sphere of violence and persecution and proclaims anew the evangel of redeeming grace. "I can do all things."

What else did he do? He embarked upon a crusade for the propagation of his new faith. A disciple of Jesus, he became an Apostle of Jesus. He went forth to lands afar, carrying the flame of his evangel to peoples of strangely varied conditions. Let us think of the strength and insight required in this manifold variety of condition and need. Every sphere he entered seemed to present a circle of new conditions.

Now he was meeting with a few women by the riverside at Philippi, and now with the philosophers at Mars Hill; and again he spake amid the pomp and luxury of imperial Rome. But Paul was level to the occasion. Every emergency found him fully equipped. "I can do all things." And how did he do it? "I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me." The strength was transmitted to him. There was a great power-house, and the energy was conveyed to him as a humble receiver. But it was more than a transmission; it was a personal transmission. "Him strengthening me." At either end there is a person, and a power passes from one to the other. It is not that at one end there is a great historic hero, a supreme example in a great gallery of heroes, and at the other end a living contemporary with searching and immediate need. No, at either end there is a living soul, and the Apostle Paul is dealing with a

living communicative energising Christ. Paul drew his sap, his spiritual force, the power which made him effective, out of living fellowship with the living Christ of God.

The tragedy in so many professedly Christian lives is here; they have no adequate powerhouse, and when they are confronted with a supremely difficult task they fail to cope with it, and are disastrously overwhelmed. They draw their power from ideals and philosophies, and it is as precarious as depending upon the electricity which we can entice from the clouds. What we need is a living Personality, who is Himself "the fountain of life," and who will pour the floods of His own vitality into our own impoverished souls. It is only "in Him" that there is "bread enough and to spare." When the new and heavy demand has been met we shall not be exhausted; there is a reserve of power which keeps us fresh for the next encounter. If we are to live a vigorous and triumphant life, carrying all before us, we need a mighty dynamic, and we can find it only in the risen and glorified Lord. "In Him" we "can do all things," even the apparently impossible. I was speaking with a Salvation Army officer some time ago, and he was telling me something of his dark and unregenerate days.

"And, sir," he said, "I had a terrible temper. In a minute it would change me into a devil." "I suppose you have conquered it now?" I said. "Oh no," he replied, "Christ has conquered it for me." The impossible had been done. And that is the secret of the victorious life.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

"Howbeit ye did well, that ye had fellowship with my affliction" (Philippians 4:14)

The Apostle always exults in the conception of fellowship. There is no spiritual privilege to which he more frequently returns. He regards himself as the centre of vast correspondences radiating in every direction. He is like some central telephonic exchange, and his intimacies are in every quarter. He has fellowship with the Divine. The Holy Spirit and he are in constant communion. There is a ceaseless passage of heavenly commerce; aspiration and inspiration cross each other continually. And he has fellowship with the human, entering into the secrets of another man's life, vibrating in ready sympathy with his thought and feeling. But there is one particular feature in his conception of fellowship which I wish to emphasise. He is possessed by an intense desire to have communions with the darker things, both in his fellow-man and in his Lord. "That I may know Him . . . and the fellowship of His sufferings." He was not contented to share the triumph of Olivet; he wanted to feel something of the pang and chill and loneliness of Gethsemane. And it is the same in his relationship with his fellow-men. He longs to share their burdens, and their secret sorrows. He will "weep with them that weep." I am therefore not surprised to find how heartily he commends the Philippians for their "fellowship with him in his affliction. He had been in ways of necessity and they had willingly shared his burden. He had been in the gloom and they had sympathetically walked with him in the darksome way.

"Not that I seek for the gift; but I seek for the fruit that increaseth to your account." I think that is a most exquisite suggestion of Paul's unselfish spirit. At the very moment when he received their gift and feels relief in his necessity, he is mindful of what is happening in the lives of those who have bestowed the gift. He knows that no man can engage in any true ministry without some transfiguring energy entering into his own life. No one can engage in any true beneficence without personally gaining a certain enrichment of life. Paul, therefore, is assured that while he has received the gift, the givers have not gone without reward. He recognised their kindness, but he was also sensitive of their own spiritual enlargement. This is a wonderful sign of spiritual alertness. He was more elated by their gain than by their gift. He was jubilantly sensitive to their growth at the very moment when they were giving their treasure away.

There is no finer attainment in the spirit than this. When our exclusiveness breaks up, and in our moments of personal ecstasy we are mindful of the light that is breaking in the lives of others, we are assuredly putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. But this is not an elementary attainment, one to which we easily spring in the opening stages of the Christian life. It is a matured grace and it comes as a natural issue of large communion with our Lord. We may test the vitality of our communion with Him by our sensitiveness to our brother, and when tested by this standard the Apostle is clearly seen to have the mind of Christ.

But the Apostle's consciousness not only contains the element of gratitude, and discernment of the spiritual enrichment of his brethren, it also includes the relationship of the gift to the Lord. For the ministry of man touches God, and this threefold relationship was in the Apostle's mind. He is sensitive in every direction, and therefore he is not numb to the impact of human things upon the Divine. "The things" that came from them were "as an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." Here is a threefold correspondence which so repeatedly possesses the life of Paul. There was a felt kindness offered to him by his friends in Philippi. There was the fertilising influence of this kindness upon their own souls. And there was the ascending odour of their gift to gratify the spirit of our Lord.

It is well for us to remember that every act has this threefold influence, impinging upon self and brother and God. When we are sensitive to all of these, our life is complete. The negligence of any one of these implies that the holy circle of life is broken. Now I

have said that the attainment of these large circles of fellowship is a matter of patient cultivation. But, happily, the possible opportunities of such cultivation are not scattered and infrequent. Every moment affords a favourable and congenial season. Every moment of common intercourse gives us the opportunity of practising brotherly discernment, and of wistfully considering the spiritual gains of our brother. There are some saints, and Paul was one of them, who are sensitive to the spiritual gains of their brethren as they would be to a new perfume if their neighbour introduced into his garden a bed of mignonette. But this need not be the acquisition of a few saints; by patient and assiduous practice it can become the gift of all.

And surely, too, we can practise the discernment of the pleasure of our Lord. Whenever a kindly deed is done, we can think of the ascending odour, "an odour of a sweet smell" most "acceptable" to God. And so shall we come to "drink of the river of His pleasures," and "the joy of the Lord" shall be our strength.

THE APOSTLE'S EXCHEQUER

"My God shall fulfil every need of yours" (Philippians 4:19, 20)

The Philippian brethren had ministered to the Apostle; the Lord, in return, shall minister to them. It was only through the Lord that any return became possible. The Apostle was a poor man. He had "suffered the loss of all things." He could not "put his hand in his pocket" and minister to material needs. In one of his letters he jubilantly describes himself as "having nothing, yet possessing all things." And it is in the triumphant conclusion of this description that we discover the secret of his noble pride. His poverty had a glorious plus. His earthly bank was empty, but he had another exchequer which was overflowing full. Not a single square yard of earth could he call his own and yet he owned the Lord of all the broad acres which stretched themselves in sunny prodigality in every land and clime. He could not boast of "my money" but he was most joyfully proud of "my God." That resource was never impoverished. The "river of God" was always "full of water." It was here, therefore, that he looked for his "return department" when he wished to requite his friends. The return kindness travelled by way of God. "My God shall fulfil every need of yours."

And so the very poorest saint has the wonderful privilege of remitting his love-debts to the heavenly bank. We can bless our benefactors through "the heavenly places." Our own hands may be obtrusively empty, but we can tell our affairs in the ears of Him who commands all the hidden treasures and essences of the universe. It may not be ours to make a return in "gold, frankincense and myrrh," but it is always in our gift to send heavenly spices, soft winds of gracious inspiration, even the things which the Lord Himself regards as "excellent." And so the poor man can make a return to the rich man. Don't let any man sit down in his material poverty and pine and mope, because to him belongs only the art and exercise of receiving; he, too, can lead a positive and active life; he, too, can be a giver, privileged to co-operate with the Lord in distributing the wealthy merchandise of grace. It is our glorious prerogative, as the consecrated children of God, to steer argosies of benediction to those who have kindly ministered to our need.

And how can we be sure of this? The assurance is given to us in the heartening news that the Lord is identified with His people in the vital bonds of an inconceivable intimacy. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, ye did it unto me." There is a nervously sensitive correspondence between our affairs and our Lord. To touch the one is to touch the other. A kindness done to a saint is incense offered to the Lord. A service rendered to a finger-tip is discerned in the court of the mind, and service rendered to the humblest subject of the kingdom is felt and appreciated by the King. How vast, then, is the range of an apparently local kindness! We thought we were ministering to a pauper, and in reality we were conversing with the King. We imagined that the fragrance would be shut up in a petty neighbourhood, and lo, the sweet aroma steals through the universe. We thought we were dealing only with Paul, and we find that we were ministering to Paul's Saviour and Lord.

And therefore, Paul, in his poverty, confidently anticipates that the kindness of the Philippians shall be more than returned by the Lord who shared it. The vast wealth of the Infinite shall move in reciprocal response. The earthly ministry shall be repaid by "riches in glory." And there one is compelled to lay down the pen in simple wonder. These "riches" are "unsearchable," unexplorable, vein beyond vein, mine beyond mine, continent beyond continent, every new discovery of the heavenly treasure sharpening the eyes for the detection of treasure which is yet concealed. And it is from this unspeakable and unthinkable glory that our kindly services are to be repaid. Heaven is to move towards us, and endow us with heavenly gifts and graces. The great ocean of grace is to flow up to the shores of our life, and fill every bay and cove with its shining flood. The man who does a kindness to a brother will find that he entertains his God. "According to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus;" according to the glory that shone and burned in our Saviour, such shall be the measure of the heavenly movement towards the children of men.

I do not wonder that the Apostle, after the contemplation of his Divine resources, should break into doxology. "Now unto our God and Father be the glory for ever and ever." With his growing experience of grace, Paul became increasingly grateful, and the letters of his old age abound in thanksgiving. He had learned the secret of keeping a wakeful spirit by the ministry of "a grateful psalm." And really there is nothing like gratitude for keeping people young. The pestering microbes, which are so destructive of the peace and

happiness of old age, cannot live in its fine and tonic air. To be an expert at the “grateful psalm” is to be immune from the devil. “No plague shall come nigh thy dwelling.” That man shall be “compassed about with songs of rejoicing.”

THE CONSECRATION OF COURTESY

“Salute every saint in Jesus Christ” (Philippians 4:21)

And so every conventionality is to be brought within the circle of light, and thereby sanctified. Even the “bells upon the horses” must be “holy unto the Lord.” The apparently unnecessary is to be hallowed. The Apostle does not favour a Christian life in which there is a dark fringe where the trifles of life are thrown together in heedless and thoughtless confusion. Everything in the Christian life must be pervaded by Christian grace and clothed in sacred beauty. Nay, it may justly be said that a man’s growth in grace may be measured by the progressive sanctification of the things “which are least.” The Christian disciple begins with large canvases, he advances to the small canvas. He draws his picture upon a thumb-nail. He puts the Infinite into the inch.

Therefore I am not surprised that this great epistle is culminating in the sanctification of the common salute, the hallowing of the ordinary courtesies between man and man. And I think the lesson is by no means gratuitous. There are many Christians, whose integrity is unimpeachable, who would yield their life rather than lie, but who are sorely lacking in fine courtesy, in gracious and winsome behaviour. They are never suspected, but they are never liked. Their discipleship is unquestioned, but they are regarded as bores. We describe them as “genuine but rough,” and in our more tolerant moments we seek their symbol in the prickly chestnut burr, with its kernel of sweet and toothsome food. The pity is that there are Christians who make a boast of their roughness, and their want of grace. They obtrude their bluntness as a shopkeeper exposes a favourite article in his window, and they find satisfaction in the exhibition.

Now, we cannot too clearly recognise that all roughness and bluntness suggest that the grace of God is being hindered, and its ministry impaired. It is absolutely sure that “the grace of the Lord Jesus,” if we give it unimpeded sway, will make us perfectly gracious, beautifying even the most conventional relationships of our life. The Lord who spends such infinite pains upon a leaf will not permit a courtesy to go unfinished. And therefore a professing Christian should be as ashamed of roughness as he is of falsehood, of discourtesy as he is of a blazing temper. Truth is grace possessing human speech; courtesy is grace possessing common behaviour; and we limit the Holy One when we hinder His entry into either sphere.

Let us, therefore, bring our “salutes” into the circle of consecration. Let us take our conventionalities, our familiar modes of recognition, our style of address, our manners, and let them all be transfigured by becoming children of light. I am persuaded that there is nothing which would more profoundly impress the world than just the illumination of the ordinary manners of the professing Christian with the grace and light of the Lord Jesus. It is not our severe morals which attract the world, but the winsomeness of our approach. It is surprising how speedily a sweet fragrance arrests men, and causes them to stand in delighted wonder. Some little time ago I heard a working man give this testimony of his master, a master who enjoys a wide fame for his philanthropy : “Ah, sir, but it’s the fine way he speaks to the likes of me that tells.” And so it is. For “though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and have not love,” a love which proves itself in tender and sensitive discernment, and in exquisite touch, “I am nothing.” Yes, it is the manner of the “salute” which tells.

After all, our intercourse with the majority of men is concerned with very slender relationships, and unless we as Christians can make these slender connections strikingly and startlingly beautiful, we have no further means of bringing “the beauty of the Lord” to bear upon our brethren. It ought to be one of the most radiant distinctions of Christians that we thus enthuse and glorify these threads of communion between us and our fellow-men. The electric energy flows into the flimsiest carbon coil, and transforms its sombre gloom into surpassing brightness. And the energies of grace should flow into thread-like intimacies with our passing brother, and make them so shining and winsome that he shall be arrested with the glory. A Christian’s salute, his “Good morning,” his “Good night,” his “How do you do?” should be distinguished from similar salutes which spring from the lips of men of the world. Our common conventionalities must be made the evangelists of our Lord.

But I must not omit to notice that the Apostle’s counsel is more particularly given to believers in their intercourse with other believers. And surely the counsel is needful and pertinent. I would to God we more diligently practised the salute in the modern Church of Christ. I would that Christians who worship in the same building would become a little more expert in the gracious art of Christian recognition. And I would that Christians who worship in different buildings, and under different forms, would become a little more free and liberal in the Christian salute. How coolly we treat one another; how often we “cut” one another. And the world is looking on. I devoutly pray that the readers of this page may sacredly resolve to foster a more gracious communion, and to reaffirm the old apostolic “salute” as one of the primary graces of the Christian life.

THE SAINTS OF CESAR'S HOUSEHOLD

"All the saints salute you, especially they that are of C Cesar's household" (Philippians 4:22)

That is a very wonderful thing that the gentle river of Christian courtesy should be flowing from the hard precincts of imperial lust and tyranny. These members of "Caesar's household" are probably only the slaves and dependants of Nero, who were possibly converted through Paul's teaching whilst he was a prisoner in the Praetorian barracks attached to the palace. But this does not in any way diminish the wonder of the transforming ministry. For in the courts of sovereigns the dependants usually assimilate the vices of their monarch. They become dyed in the popular colour, and they wear the habits of the prevailing fashion. In this respect vice is like virtue — "it streams from the hills, it descends to the plains," and the lowliest members in the vast fellowship are prone to be infected with the common contagion.

But here is a clean, clear river, streaming out of the very centre of a poisonous swamp. Here is a sweet spring lifting its healthful waters in the bitter waste. Here is a white lily spreading its radiant purity above a very noisome bed. This is the kind of miracle to arrest and startle the world. Goodness in unexpected places! "He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains." That is the wonder of it, that the tender thing is growing on the cold and inhospitable heights. If we had found it in the sheltered valley where the dews are heavy and drenching, and where the harsh wind is softened to a wooing caress, it would have awakened little or no interest. But to find it growing "upon the mountains," on the very playground of the storm, in the very teeth of contending blasts — that is the marvel which fascinates our notice and regard.

Now, if I may write it very reverently, God seems to delight in rearing His beauties in the most difficult and unlikely places. I recently found a most exquisite fern, quite away from any "ferny" fellowship, nestling in a heap of bare and jagged rocks, and nourishing itself on the merest pinch of soil. And yet there it was, lifting its lovely fronds as bravely and triumphantly as though it had all the wealth of a moist and luscious forest-bed in which to lay its roots. This seems to be one of the delights of our God. Even in our grim, grimy, sooty railway stations He makes His lichens grow, and we should see them if only our eyes were sufficiently practised and expert in discernment. But pre-eminently is all this true in the highest regions of grace. The Lord loves to rear His saints in unlikely and difficult places, yea, in the very midst of blasphemy and desolation. He has a peculiar joy in exhibiting His saints in Caesar's household. He delights in growing a disciple in the very ranks of the publicans. "Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me."

One of the sweetest and purest souls I have ever met, pure as a snowdrop, and sweet as the eglantine, was thus wonderingly referred to by a friend : "And her father was such a drunkard!" Yes, even in that cold, chilly environment the snowdrop grew. A commissioner of one of our great London "dailies" has recently been exploring some of the awful, howling wastes of London's slums. He went into one court, and up one terrible flight of stairs, where gin and sweat and swearing and putridity were horribly commingled, and in the very thick of it all he heard a woman's sweet, clear, triumphant voice singing, "We thank Thee, O our Father, for all things bright and good." Yes, and the commissioner discovered that she was a saint indeed. But how adverse the environment. Where did the lovely fern find even the requisite pinch of friendly earth? God knows, and He provided it. It seems as though God's plants can laugh at circumstances, that they can sink strange roots right through their immediate setting, and reach such marvellous resources that their inhospitable environment counts for nothing. "He shall not fear in time of drought." "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear." The word of the Lord abounds in such promises. "Thou spreadest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." A feast, with the encircling but impotent enemies looking on; the environment most unfriendly, and yet the wellfilled table of the Lord in the midst.

And so we ought not to be despondent concerning the very hardest sphere. What could have seemed more unlikely than that the insignificant Jew, the poor, lonely captive in Rome, should have been made instrumental in unsealing fountains of blessedness in the hard, sterile wastes of the court itself? But "springs broke out in the desert." And so let us address ourselves to wilderness-work with a courageous and singing spirit. God is with us. Let us put our best into the worst, and let us make the stony waste resound with the happy song of the minister of the Lord.

THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit" (Philippians 4:23)

And so this letter, which began in a prayer of grace, ends in the same petition. It is a little volume of graciousness, bound within the covers of grace. It is therefore a model letter, and should be regarded as the type of all Christian correspondence and conversation. Intercourse which has its springs in grace, and which returns to its fountain, will always be pervaded by vitalising and fertilising

power. Water rises no higher than its source, and the same law prevails in the realm of human fellowship. We don't begin high enough to keep at a high level. We begin somewhere in the country of our own self, and therefore our neighbourly communion does not attain to the heights. The only hope of a lofty correspondence with our fellows is that we begin in "the heavenly places in Christ Jesus," away in the spiritual uplands, in the august and mighty altitudes of grace. And the blessed privilege of the Christian life is this, that all our affairs can have mountain origin, and can be children of the heights. Even a homely letter can take its rise in grace.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus!" Yes, but what is grace? We can no more define it than we can define life, or love, or God. But there are certain aspects of it, which are described in the Scriptures, and which, in the present stage of our experience, are really all we need to know. For instance, whatever it is, in its very essence, it is something which we have not merited or deserved. We cannot secure it by our virtue; we cannot earn it by our toil. No man can put out his hand and demand it as a right. The outstretched hand must be the hand of a suppliant, and he must take it as a favour. Grace is the spontaneous gift of our God to children who have nothing to offer in return.

Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling. Naked, come to Thee for dress, Helpless, look to Thee for grace.

Then, in the second place, grace is much more than a favourable attitude of our God. It is more than benignity of countenance and friendliness of regard. It is a real, positive energy, as real in the spiritual realm as electricity in the realm of matter. Never let us think of grace as only a passive sentiment — a sort of indolent good-nature, a pose in which the awful lightning hides its threatening darts no more. No, grace is a positive power, an unthinkably active beneficence: grace works. If any one will take the many references made to grace by the Apostle Paul, and bring this clue to their interpretation, he will be amazed what a world of benign activity will open out before him. Here is one, taken almost at random: "We have good hope through grace." That great word surely means more than that the good Lord has flung open the pearly gates, and that at the last we shall find an abundant entrance into His everlasting kingdom. The good hope is kept alive, not only by an open door, but by a present, active ministry of spiritual force, which is just the grace of God. The light in the old lighthouses was kept burning by unfailing supplies of oil. And grace is just the oil-energy in my life, and by its ministry the light of hope is kept burning in my soul, and I remain a consecrated optimist, a child of light.

Or take this other reference of the Apostle : "Singing with grace in your hearts, unto the Lord." Am I to interpret this grace as just my conception of God's goodness, or is it the real energy of God's goodness working in me? I know the season when song becomes natural, and when my life breaks into spontaneous music like the melody of the brook. It is when my soul is fresh and buoyant, and I breathe a spiritual air which is like the new, quickening air of the morning. Now, this is accurately descriptive of one of the ministries of grace. It purifies the climate of a life, it washes and cleanses the spiritual atmosphere, it is concerned with my breath and breathing, and by the gloriously tonic and invigorating air it gives elasticity to all my powers, and my very feet become "like hind's feet," and I spring to my work with a song. I might multiply similar examples, for the New Testament abounds in them, and I think they would bring confirmation to the teaching that grace is the beneficent love-energy of the eternal God, actively ministering in the lives of men, and seeking their loveliness in a perfected redemption.

And so grace produces graces; graces are just its flowers and fruits. To whom, then, is it given? "He giveth grace to the humble." Grace can enter the heart of the humble publican who stands afar off smiting upon his breast, and he goes down to his house "justified"; but the self-satisfied Pharisee is impervious to its influence, and dry-rot is proceeding within. Pride makes the heart graceproof; grace cannot get in. "To this man will I look, even to him that is of a humble and contrite heart." Such a one will joyfully find that "where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound," and these energies of the mighty and loving Redeemer will perfect His love-purpose until the man is "all light in the Lord." And therefore we may all heartily and sincerely offer the Apostle's prayer for one another, for it is the greatest prayer that can pass across human lips, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

THE END